Memories from the Land of Amnesty: Historical Narratives of the Armed Right in Brazil

by

Ana Paula Santana Bertho

B.A. (Honours), University of São Paulo, 2017

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We acknowledge and respect the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsəm/Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

In 2018, Brazilians elected the far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro, a retired military captain, as President. His open praise of the military dictatorship (1964–1985) and the support it received among civilians called into question the hegemony of victim-centered memories about that period. This thesis dialogues with this context and aims to investigate the role of the armed right memories in contemporary Brazilian democracy, focusing on how these narratives have shaped public discourse and national identity. Drawing on Ksenija Bilbija and Leigh A. Payne's concept of "memory market," the study analyzes two memory products: the commemorations of March 31st (chosen by the military as the date of the coup d'état of 1964) between 2014 and 2022 and the Army's Historical Museum and Fort Copacabana in Rio de Janeiro. Based on the examination of newspaper coverage, government documents, interviews, and exhibitions, this study argues that the military has sought to refashion its role in the new democracy, reaffirming its authoritarian saviour role while attempting to engage with the era of human rights speech. The rise of "uncivil groups" after 2013 empowered the authoritarian nostalgia in the public sphere, mobilizing symbols of the past to justify authoritarian projects in the present. Bolsonaro emerged as a spokesperson for these actors. His government represented the institutionalization of the right armed narratives, paradoxically generating tensions with some military sectors while instrumentalizing these memories as fuel for the storming of Brasília in January 2023.

Key-words: Brazil, Military memories, March 31, Army's Historical Museum and Fort Copacabana, military dictatorship, Bolsonaro's government

Resumo

Em 2018, o candidato de extrema-direita Jair Bolsonaro, capitão reformado do Exército, foi eleito presidente do Brasil. Suas falas enaltecendo a ditadura militar (1964–1985) e o apoio que recebeu de civis colocaram em questão a hegemonia das memórias centradas nas vítimas daquele período. Neste sentido, esta dissertação tem como objetivo investigar o papel das memórias da direita armada na democracia brasileira contemporânea, com foco em como essas narrativas têm moldado o discurso público e a identidade nacional. A partir do conceito de "mercado da memória", de Ksenija Bilbija e Leigh A. Payne, a pesquisa se debruça sobre dois produtos de memória: as comemorações de 31 de março (data escolhida pelos militares como marco do golpe de 1964), entre 2014 e 2022, e o Museu Histórico do Exército e Forte de Copacabana, no Rio de Janeiro. A partir da análise da cobertura de imprensa, de documentos oficiais, entrevistas e exposições, este trabalho argumenta que as Forças Armadas têm buscado remodelar seu papel na nova democracia, reafirmando seu papel autoritário e de salvador da pátria, ao mesmo tempo em que tentam dialogar com o discurso pró-direitos humanos. O surgimento de "grupos incivis" após 2013 empoderou o discurso nostálgico sobre a ditadura na esfera pública, mobilizando símbolos do passado para justificar projetos autoritários no presente. Neste contexto, Bolsonaro emergiu como porta-voz desses atores. Seu governo representou a institucionalização das narrativas da direita armada, o que, paradoxalmente, gerou tensões com alguns setores militares, mas, ao mesmo tempo, serviu de combustível para a invasão de Brasília em janeiro de 2023.

Palavras-chave: Brasil, Memórias Militares, 31 de Março, Museu Histórico do Exército e Forte de Copacabana, Ditadura Militar, Governo Bolsonaro

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Abbreviations

CEMDP	Comissão Especial sobre Mortos e Desaparecidos Políticos (Special Commission on Political Deaths and Disappearances)
CNV	Comissão Nacional da Verdade (National Truth Commission)
DEM	Democratas (Democrats)
DOI-CODI	Destacamento de Operações de Informações - Centro de Operações de Defesa Interna (Department of Information Operations - Center for Internal Defence Operations)
FGTS	Fundo de Garantia do Tempo de Serviço (Length-of-Service Guarantee Fund)
FHC	Fernando Henrique Cardoso
IPHAN	Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage)
MBL	Movimento Brasil Livre (Free Brazil Movement)
MHEx/FC	Museu Histórico do Exército e Forte de Copacabana (Army's Historical Museum and Fort Copacabana)
MINUSTAH	Missão das Nações Unidas para a Estabilização no Haiti (United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti)
MPF	Ministério Público Federal (Federal Public Ministry)
OAB	Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil (Order of Attorneys of Brazil)
PCdoB	Partido Comunista do Brasil (Communist Party of Brazil)
PDT	Partido Democrático Trabalhista (Democratic Labour Party)

PL	Partido Liberal (Liberal Party)
PP	Progressistas (Progressives)
PSB	Partido Socialista Brasileiro (Brazilian Socialist Party)
PSDB	Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (Brazilian Social Democracy Party)
PSOL	Partido Socialismo e Liberdade (Socialism and Liberty Party)
PT	Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party)
SUDAM	Superintendência do Desenvolvimento da Amazônia (Superintendency of Development for the Amazon)

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This thesis was written with tears, grief, huge life changes, and beautiful life encounters.

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Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto.

Dedication

For my loving family: Marlucia de Santana Bertho (in memoriam), Edvard José Bertho (in memoriam) and Tandy (in memoriam)

"Eles combinaram de nos matar, mas a gente combinamos de não morrer"

("They agreed to kill us, but we agreed not to die")

Conceição Evaristo

"Betraying the Constitution is betraying the Motherland. We know that wretched path: shred the Constitution, lock the doors of the Parliament, strangle freedom, send patriots to jail, to exile, to the graveyard.

When, after so many years of struggle and sacrifice, we enacted the Statute of the Man of Freedom and Democracy, we shouted for the imposition of its honour.

We have hatred for dictatorships, hatred and disgust.

We curse tyranny wherever it disgraces men and nations, especially in Latin America.

(...)

As a seashell, the constitution will store the waves of suffering and of hope forever.

(Ulysses Guimarães' speech on the enactment of the Constitution of Brazil on October 5, 1988)

Introduction: What Did We Do Wrong?

That was the question I repeated in my mind, along with a feeling of frustration, on October 28, 2018, when the polls indicated that Jair Bolsonaro (then a member of the Social Liberal Party, now the Liberal Party) would be Brazil's new president. Thirty years after the end of a military dictatorship (1964-1985), how could Brazilians elect a retired military captain? Despite the persistence of silences and the tensions that continue to shape how the country discusses its authoritarian past, I was among those who believed that the narratives of resistance against authoritarianism dominated the public sphere. We thought that these pro-human rights memories would prevent the election of someone who openly defended the torture of opponents and promoted a negationist account of violations during the regime. We were wrong.

Four years later, on January 8, 2023, I was more aware of the disputes over the different meanings and legacies of 1964 in our society. Nevertheless, I watched perplexed as thousands of people stormed the Brazilian National Congress, the Supreme Court, and the Presidential Palace in Brasília to attempt a coup d'état, an attack on the centre of Brazil's democracy that mirrored the January 6th Capitol riots in Washington, DC, two years prior. Since the presidential election of October 2022, Bolsonaro's supporters across Brazil refused to acknowledge his defeat to Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva by two million votes. Besides blockages of roads and encampments outside military headquarters, which had already been ongoing for weeks, the storming of governmental buildings aimed to champion a military intervention to "save Brazil." Rioters sought to destroy the buildings that are symbols of democracy, furiously targeting works of art and artifacts considered cultural heritage. They also injured and threatened journalists, considered "enemies," forcing them to delete recorded images and breaking or stealing their equipment.

Bolsonaro's election in 2018 and the "January 8th" left a trail of destruction, making more explicit the social tensions and cracks in Brazilian democracy. This work acknowledges that complex factors contributed to Bolsonaro's election, ranging from global phenomena to historical issues from the Brazilian context, such as the crisis of representative democracy, populism, a neoliberalist agenda, tough-on-crime rhetoric, and racism. However, the last few years also showed that one of these factors was also cultural: an idealized image of the military dictatorship period, an idea that many Brazilians share, admire, and wish to bring into the present. An illustrative scene of this idea was the final encounter between the invaders and the police at the National Congress during the storm. Many participants cried with gratitude at seeing officers arrive as heroes, even though the forces had come to arrest them.

To date, the scholarship about memories in the post-conflict context in Latin America has primarily focused on the narratives of the victims of the authoritarian regimes. This interest has been crucial to interpreting and giving meaning to the past, often serving to legitimize victims' voices and to advance claims for justice. However, Bolsonaro's election demonstrated the importance of considering military memories as well. Although they have not been in the "memory mainstream," the armed right and its supporters never stopped working on these narratives. After all, they are also what Elizabeth Jelin defined as "memory entrepreneurs."[1] In this regard, my work aims to analyze military memories in Brazil through cultural manifestations, focusing on the following questions: What is the social and political role of the armed right's memories of the military dictatorship in Brazilian democracy? Which symbols do these memories mobilize? What are their uses and meanings in the present? How did they dialogue with the human rights era?

[1] Elizabeth Jelin, *Los Trabajos de la Memoria* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2012, 2nd edition), 146.

Memories from the Land of Amnesty[2]

Indeed, discussing and remembering the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-1985) has never been an easy task. Scholarship frequently compares the country with its neighbours in the Southern Cone that experienced military regimes to shed light on these challenges. In general, the negotiated transition to democracy, along with the first three decades that followed, approached the past with cautious accountability, and the state often prioritized political stability over confronting the legacies of authoritarianism. This stance helps explain the enduring role of the military in Brazil.

Violence is the first controversial point. Although Brazil "inaugurated" the new era of authoritarian governments in Latin America and the military had access to sophisticated methods of repression, the official number of forced disappearances and deaths (four hundred twenty-four) is relatively low compared to the thousands reported in Chile and tens of thousands in Argentina. Furthermore, unlike in these countries, most of these cases occur not at the beginning but between 1969 and 1974, during the armed struggle. Far from creating a "terror" competition, Eric Hershberg and Felipe Agüero, Samantha Quadrat, and Carlos Fico point out that this lack of visibility of political violence is used to argue that Brazil did not have a *ditadura*, but a *ditabranda* (a "soft dictatorship"), representing the military as less violent than their counterparts abroad.[3] As

[2] The title of this thesis was inspired by an interview with the actor and director Wagner Moura to the TV show *Roda Viva* to promote the film *Marighella.* On that occasion, he explained the two-year-censorship that the film suffered from Jair Bolsonaro's government for telling the story of the guerrilla leader who was considered enemy number one of the military dictatorship. Moura argued that Brazil was "the Land of Amnesty" based on two different public reactions after the film was finally released: a boycott organized by far-right groups and the positive reception among social movements who organized popular exhibitions, including sessions outside movie theaters and in camps and urban occupations, to discuss authoritarianism, social justice, and democracy in Brazil. The image of a country divided by memory conveys the topic discussed in this work. Interview with the director and actor Wagner Moura (Marighella). Roda Viva, November 1, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FvOO3Gysd7Q&t=1629s.

[3] Eric Hershberg and Felipe Agüero, "Introduction," in *Memorias militares sobre la represión en el Cono Sur: Visiones en disputa en dictadura y democracia*, ed. Eric Hershberg and Felipe Agüero (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2002), 1-34; Samantha Quadrat, "The Skirmish of Memories and Political Violence in Dictatorial Brazil," in *The Struggle for Memory in Latin America: Recent History and Political Violence*, ed. Eugenia Allier-Monta and Emilio Crenzel, (New

Fico argues, this narrative overlooks the regime's reliance on ongoing systems of social control, censorship, and propaganda. For this reason, the author argues that Brazilian historians face frustration rather than trauma when approaching violence, as this narrative minimizes or denies the experience of terror.

In remembering the past, violence was also a key point. According to the historian Marcos Napolitano, the hegemonic memory — which could be understood as an emblematic memory, as defined by Steve Stern[4] — was formulated through a distancing between liberals (whose spaces of action were the associations of liberal professionals, business unions and the press), and the military in power. This process of building a social memory of 1964 began in the 1970s, drawing from the experiences of actors who supported the coup but understood that the military would not "return" power to civilians. Alongside the protests and cultural works that helped wear down the regime, the liberals developed a narrative around the idea that the conflict between the state and the armed struggle dragged all political actors and civil society along. This hegemonic memory erased the liberal role in the coup and, curiously, incorporated values and speeches from left-wing groups (particularly the Brazilian Communist Party, PCB) that did not participate in the armed struggle. Regarding the armed groups, they received a kind of historical forgiveness from the liberals, which both condemned the repression they were subjected to, but also classified the guerrilla as just a youthful idealism without basis in reality, not as a political option at that time. This process consolidated the pair authoritarian state versus democratic civil society and was vital for the rebuilding of the political system that took place in the 1980s.[5]

York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 71-89; and Carlos Fico, "Violence, Trauma, and Frustration in Brazil and Argentina: The Role of the Historian." *Topoi*, 27: 2 (2013): 239-261.

[4] Emblematic memories are human inventions that are not arbitrarily forged. They are the product of social conflict, born and acquired through multiple efforts, conflicts, and historical upheavals. Steve Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile: On the Eve of London 1998* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 105-106.

[5] Marcos Napolitano, "Recordar É Viver: As Dinâmicas e Vicissitudes da Construção da Memória Sobre o Regime Militar Brasileiro," *Antíteses* 8, no. 15 (2015), 17.

To some extent, the still-in-force Amnesty Law of 1979 consolidated these views on violence and memory. Different from the self-amnesty legislation in Chile and Argentina, the dictatorship granted pardon to military personnel and "some" opponents, excluding those involved in personal attacks, terrorism, kidnapping, and robbery against the regime. Historian Samantha Quadrat remembers that the historian and former guerrilla member Daniel Aarão Reis Filho named this process "historical (re)construction and displacement of meaning."[6] The law did not resemble the project for a "vast, comprehensive and unrestricted law" championed by campaigns over the 1970s. The law also incorporated the historical narrative that restricted violence to the armed conflict. Still, it took one step further and placed, on the same level, state terrorism and the violence perpetrated by armed groups. The Amnesty Law, along with the defeat of the *Diretas, Já!* (Direct (Elections), Now!) campaign in 1984, pushed an idea of transition to democracy where the country needed to move on.[7]

Between 1985 and 1995, victims of state violence, relatives of disappeared people, human rights NGOs, social movements, and scholars committed to not forgetting this past. In a context of transition, for these groups building collective memory entails seeking reparation, accountability, and public recognition of the human rights violations they suffered. In Brazil, some of their efforts turned into official policies under the governments of three presidents who had been harmed by the military regime.[8] However, this did not mean a complete commitment of the state

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[6] Samantha Quadrat, "The Skirmish of Memories and Political Violence in Dictatorial Brazil," 76-77.

[7] Between 1983 and 1984, millions of Brazilians gathered in several cities to demand direct presidential elections. However, such change required the approval of a constitutional amendment by a Congress still largely dominated by pro-dictatorship representatives. The proposal failed. In 1985, Tancredo Neves, an opposition leader, won the indirect election, but unexpectedly died before taking the office in that year. His Vice-President, José Sarney, a longtime member of the regime's party who had joined the opposition only a few months before this election, assumed the presidency and governed Brazil until 1989.

[8] Fernando Henrique Cardoso, also known as FHC (1995-2001), is a sociologist who was full professor at the University of São Paulo until 1968, when he was compulsory retired by the military dictatorship. In 1995, he created the *Comissão Especial sobre Mortos e Desaparecidos Políticos* (Special Commission on Political Deaths and Disappearances - CEMDP). Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2002-2010 and 2023-present) is a former union leader who

to critically examining its past. There has been politics of memory, as well as financial and symbolic reparations influenced by the hegemonic memory, but nothing regarding judicial accountability. The armed forces, part of the same state, have mostly relied on the Amnesty Law to remain silent, creating a taboo around the topic. In 2010, the Supreme Federal Court upheld the law of 1979, which represented the democratic order reaffirming the institutionality of the military regime and protecting the perpetrators again. Both in 2010 and 2018, the Inter-American Court on Human Rights sentenced Brazil and reiterated that historical truth does not fulfill the state's obligation to ensure the determination of individual responsibility through criminal trials. However, no action has been taken in this direction.[9] Moreover, during the Brazilian Constituent Assembly in 1987-1988, the military acted as a "uniformized party" and guaranteed autonomy and the maintenance of the military prerogative, including control over national defence. In this sense, the new democracy did not challenge the military's enduring belief that the armed forces are responsible for protecting the nation.[10]

As a result, the historian Marcos Napolitano argues that every scholar working on post-conflict Brazil must face entanglement: the paradoxical character of Brazilian democracy. The Brazilian state, for most of the time since the transition, has championed the hegemonic memory

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was persecuted and arrested for leading strikes in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In 2009, he launched the project *Memórias Reveladas* (Revealed Memories) and, in the following year, the *Programa Nacional de Direitos Humanos* (National Program of Human Rights). Dilma Vana Rousseff (2011-2016) is an economist who joined the VAR Palmares (Revolutionary Armed Vanguard Palmares), a Marxist-Leninist urban guerrilla. She was tortured and jailed between 1970-1972. In 2011, she established the *Comissão Nacional da Verdade* (National Truth Commission, CNV).

[9] The Court also highlights that legal proceedings recognize the victims as "holders of rights." See Gomes Lund and Other Cases ("Araguaia Guerrilla) vs Brazil (2010) and Herzog Case and Other Cases vs Brazil (2018). On the *Conselho Nacional de Justiça* (National Council of Justice) website, both sentences are available for download as well as a quantitative panel that monitors Brazil fullfilment of the reparation measures. "Brazilian Litigation Cases," https://www.cnj.jus.br/poder-judiciario/relacoes-internacionais/monitoramento-e-fiscalizacao-das-decisoes-da-corte-idh/casos-contenciosos-brasileiros/ (Accessed 31 October 2025).

[10] David P. Sacci Junio, Mariana da Gama Janot and Samuel Alves Soares, "Uma Constituinte Heteronoma Frente às Forças Armadas," in *Forças Armadas e Política no Brasil Republicano Vol.1: da Proclamação da República à Constituição Cidadã (1889-1988)*, ed. Maria Celina D'Araujo and Lucas Pereira Rezende (Rio de Janeiro: FGV, 2024), 237-241.

to distance itself from the last dictatorship. However, the same state seems unable to free itself from authoritarian institutional legacies — particularly in public security — and legal ties. Understanding the armed right narratives in Brazil requires analyzing how military actors and their allies dialogue and react to this controversy involving violence, memory and justice.

The Memory Market of Armed Right Memories

In *Accounting for Violence*, Ksenija Bilbija and Leigh A.Payne argue that narratives about the authoritarian pasts in Latin America have been turned into products over the last decades and, as such, are distributed, marketed, and consumed in the form of movies, books, museums, sites, and rituals, among other examples. Drawing on the vocabulary and strategies associated with the neoliberal times, the authors analyze how, in the memory market, time is used to produce value and values. Over time, memory goods can promote some accountability of the violence, both computing and acknowledging the losses, and also generate profit from pushing forward the "never again."[11] In this sense, Rebecca Atencio's *Memory's Turn* highlights how memory products have been important in advancing the politics of memory in Brazil. In the negotiated transition, the author observes "cycles of memory," an interplay between cultural works and institutional mechanisms circumscribed in the transitional justice, describing how memory entrepreneurs relied on this "imaginary linkage" to promote the human rights agenda.[12]

While Bilbija and Payne, and Atencio focused on the victims and their relatives' roles in this "moral economy," this thesis incorporates armed right actors not only as a kind of "forgetfulness" entrepreneurs but also as active memory-makers. In this respect, my study parallels

[11] Ksenija Bilbija and Leigh A.Payne, "Time is money," in *Accounting for Violence: Marketing Memory in Latin America*, ed. Ksenija Bilbija and Leigh A. Payne (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 1-40.
[12] Rebecca Atencio, *Memory's Turn: Reckoning with Dictatorship in Brazil* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014).

historian Cynthia Milton's pioneering *Conflicted Memory*, which identifies different military cultural productions reflecting on the war against Shining Path in Peru and examines their interaction with accountability processes. Her book represents a milestone in the scholarship about post-conflict in Latin America for demonstrating how military has appropriated human rights lexicon to refashion themselves in the democratic era and shift public opinion about collective memory.[13]After all, as Jelin and Milton have noted, it is not memory versus forgetting, but "memory versus memory,"[14] even though the armed right promotes "memories that are both counterintuitive and run counter to the 'victim-oriented' narratives.[15]

The military's participation in Brazil's memory market was modest compared to the cultural production that supported the hegemonic memory. Eric Hershberg and Felipe Agüero observed that, after the transition to democracy, the armed forces continued to defend the legitimacy of the dictatorship as a counterrevolution within the barracks and military schools, while adopting a quiet public posture. In general, they insisted on " silence is golden" and "turning the page and moving forward," which was supported by the following civil presidents, even to avoid discussions around accountability.[16] Still, they needed to reposition and present themselves publicly.

The armed forces'most famous memory products are books, reflecting a reaction to the *publication boom* of memoirs written by former guerrilla members and serving as an official response to the account *Brazil: Never Again* (1985). Between 1985 and 1988, the armed forces

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[13] Cynthia Milton, *Conflicted Memory: Military Cultural Interventions and the Human Rights Era in Peru* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2018).
[14] Elizabeth Jelin, *Los Trabajos de la Memoria*, 36.
[15] Cynthia Milton, and Michael J. Lazzara, "Introduction: Countermemories and the Challenges to Human Rights in Latin America," in *How the Military Remembers: Human Rights and Countermemories in Latin America*, ed. Cynthia Milton and Michael J. Lazzara (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2025), 5.
[16] Eric Hershberg and Felipe Agüero, "Introduction," in *Memorias militares sobre la represión en el Cono Sur: Visiones en disputa en dictadura y democracia*, edited by Eric Hershberg and Felipe Agüero (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2002), 22.

wrote *Orvil: Tentativas de Tomada do Poder* (Orvil: Attempts to Seize Power). *Orvil* is the word *livro* (book in Portuguese) written backwards and, according to its authors, was the narrative of the "winners of 1964," combating the "left-wing version" and honouring the military victims. The President José Sarney prohibited the publication of the book in the name of "political stability." Still, copies circulated internally among military personnel, inspiring, for example, Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, who will be cited many times in this thesis, in publishing *Rompendo o Silêncio*. In 2007, *Orvil* was made available online and inspired, among others, Olavo de Carvalho, a self-proclaimed philosopher who influenced Bolsonarism, especially regarding the idea of an existing "Cultural War" in which left-wing narratives should be eliminated.[17]

Still in the publication domain, other important books resulted from interviews. Military personnel were invited to speak about the regime in public events or in research conducted by a few scholars interested in the armed right memories. In this case, the oral history project led by the political scientist Maria Celina D'Araújo, the anthropologist Celso Castro, and the sociologist Gláucio Ary Dillon Soares is an important source of information on military memories.[18] Although these books are not a "military product" *per se*, since their authors did not belong to the armed forces, they played an essential role by "packaging" and "selling" the memories of those who had been young officers in 1964 but built their military careers during the dictatorship and became key

[17] In *Orvil*, the main argument is that the Communism attempted to seize power four times: in 1935 (in the *Intentona Comunista*, which will be explained later in this thesis), 1964, 1968-1974 (during the armed struggle) and 1985, with the *boom* of cultural works opposing the military dictatorship. As in previous instances, the armed forces were compelled to act, and Orvil was the outcome of this initiative. See Priscila Carlos Brandão, and Isabel Cristina Leite, "Nunca Foram Heróis! A Disputa pela Imposição de Significados em Torno do Emprego da Violência na Ditadura Militar Brasileira, por Meio de uma Leitura de ORVIL,"*Anos 90* 19, no 35 (2012): 299–327 and Camilla Machuy, Marcos Schneider, and Priscila Seixas, "Inimigo à Esquerda: Conservadorismo Brasileiro e as Origens da Guerra Contra a Cultura," *Revista Ecopos 27*, no 1 (2024): 353-377.

[18] Celina d'Araújo, Celso Castro and Gláucio Ary Dillon Soares published together *Os Anos de Chumbo. A Memória Militar Sobre a Repressão* (Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará, 1994) and *Visões do Golpe. A Memória Militar Sobre 1964* (Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará, 1994). Later, Araújo and Castro released together *Militares e Política na Nova República* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora da FGV, 2001).

figures in the transition to democracy. In the 1990s, since *Orvil* publication was not authorized and perhaps as an effort to join the memory market, the military took advantage of these interviews to defend the "Revolution of 1964," while enabling scholars to understand the nuances between the military considered "softliners" and "hardliners" throughout the regime.[19]

More recently, with the rise of the far-right and the spreading of historical revisionism, the armed right allies have joined the memory market, particularly with online products. In addition to memes, perhaps the most representative product is Brasil Paralelo's documentary *1964 - O Brasil Entre Armas e Livros* (1964 - Brazil Between Weapons and Books). According to the company that offers news, streaming and educational services aligned with that political view, the movie does not glorify the mistakes made by the regime, but neither "hide the need for a military intervention to defeat Communism."[20]

My thesis focuses on two military memory products: the commemorations of March 31st (the date of the coup d'état in Brazil in 1964) and the Army's Historical Museum and Fort Copacabana. While there is a scholarship about the former object of study, except for a failed

[19] Drawing on the studies of Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, the political scientist Carlos Schmidt Arturi observes that, in the Brazilian case, the *blandos* and *duros* were present not only during the transition but throughout the entire regime. The softliners, *linha Sorbonne* or *castelistas* had access to further military education in both in Brazil and in the US and many of them had public roles before the regime. They were liberal-conservative in politics and had a project based on foreign capital. This faction included Presidents Humberto Castelo Branco (after whom the group was named) (1964-1967), Ernesto Geisel (1974-1979), and João Figueiredo (1979-1985). In contrast, the hardliners, mostly young officers, primarily served in command positions within the intelligence and repression services. They did not have a political project. and were more receptive to radical discourse. The Presidents Artur da Costa e Silva (1967-1969) and Emílio Médici (1969-1974) represented this group. Carlos Schmidt Arturi, "Os Militares e a Abertura Politica no Brasil (1974-1985)," in *Forças Armadas e Política no Brasil Republicano Vol.1: da Proclamação da República à Constituição Cidadã (1889-1988)*, ed. Maria Celina D'Araujo and Lucas Pereira Rezende (Rio de Janeiro: FGV, 2024), 213-214.

[20] 1964 - O Brasil Entre Armas e Livros - Brasil Paralelo. YouTube Video, 2:07. April 2, 2019. :https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTenWQHRPIg. Brasil Paralelo, "Ditadura Militar no Brasil ou Regime Militar? Entenda Definitivamente Como Foi o Golpe de 64," https://www.brasilparalelo.com.br/artigos/ditadura-militar-no-brasil (Acessed 30 September 2025). About the documentary, see Cristiano Lima Ferraz; João Henrique Rocha da Silva, and Emanuelle da Silva Freitas, "Negacionismo, Revisionismo e História Pública: Brasil Entre Armas e Livros sob uma Perspectiva Crítica,"*Revista Binacional Brasil-Argentina: Diálogo entre as Ciências* 14, no 02 (2024): 197–217 and Gustavo Fardi Anzuategui, "Comentários ao documentário "Entre Armas e Livros": Ensino e Aprendizagem Histórica Versus Ideologias de Direita," *Revista Docente*s, 10 (35): 61-67.

attempt to open a museum in honour of a military officer who fought the guerrillas, the literature about military museums in Brazil is silent about the military dictatorship.[21] Both research objects have public visibility, in different ways, and are not restricted to the armed right and its supporters. They are also "live experiences" and enable us to track the memory turns over the past decades, including its relationship to the human rights era.

Chapters structure

Chapter 1 analyzes the commemorations of March 31st between 2014 and 2018 as reported by the three main newspapers in Brazil. Since the transition to democracy, military and civil groups have always commemorated/celebrated the date privately. However, during the years in question, these commemorations entered the public sphere to address the political crisis Brazil experienced. From this process, Bolsonaro emerged as a spokesperson for the historical narratives of the armed right and for the far-right claims.

Chapter 2 continues the investigations of March 31st during Bolsonaro's government (2019-2022), when he institutionalized the commemorations of the date. Based on newspaper articles and the official Orders of the Day, the chapter analyzes how Bolsonaro and his government used — and abused — the argument that a future military intervention could save Brazil from left-wing parties (or from "Communism"). The chapter also reveals divisions within the military over whether to publicize the commemorations and whether to agree with Bolsonaro's use of March 31st in his discourse.

Chapter 3 explores the Army's Historical Museum and Fort of Copacabana in Rio de Janeiro, examining how the narrative that the army is the saviour of the nation dates back to before Bolsonaro and 1964. The analysis is based on visits to the institution, the memoir *Forte de*

[21] Ronaldo Zatta, "Museu Tenente Camargo: Tentame Frustrado do Exército para Criação de um Museu Casa Histórica Militar," *Revista Grifos* 23, no 36/37 (2012): 147–159.

Copacabana: Tiros de Cultura na Cidade, written by Colonel José Luiz Freitas, who served as commandant of the Fort of Copacabana from 1994 to 1996, and interviews.[22] The Museum serves as an example of how the army has utilized culture to integrate into the new democracy.

All translations from the Portuguese throughout this work are my own unless otherwise noted.

[22] Ethics approval for this research was provided bu the UVic Office of Research Services/ Human Research Ethics Board, certificate number: 23-0056.

Chapter 1: Unfortunate Dates: Celebrating the Military Dictatorship in Brazil (2014-2018)

1. Introduction

On March 31st or April 1st? Six decades after the coup d'état, there are still discussions about the exact date the military dictatorship began. Factually, most scholars, such as the historian Marcos Napolitano, explain that the coup d'état of 1964 started on the evening of March 30th, when President João Goulart, also known as Jango, attended the 40th anniversary of the Association of Military Police Sub-lieutenants and Sergeants at Automóvel Clube do Brasil in Rio de Janeiro. For the armed forces' high command, Goulart's attendance at this event was the last straw. Goulart had granted amnesty to rebellious sailors and marines who had been demanding better working conditions weeks earlier. Once again, the President was breaking the military hierarchy, even though in his speech, he argued that sub-lieutenants and sergeants should act within the institutional order in their claim for labour rights, respecting the hierarchy and, from their perspective, Christian principles.[23] Listening to Goulart's speech on the radio, Generals Olímpio Mourão Filho and Carlos Luís Guedes, respectively in the cities of Juiz de Fora and Belo Horizonte, decided that their troops would march to Rio de Janeiro to depose Jango. Indeed, in the early morning, after gathering with Minas Gerais state governor José de Magalhães Pinto, who was sympathetic to their plan, both started their march.

On March 31st, other civilian and military groups across the country, including Rio de Janeiro, also began articulating plans to overthrow the federal government. In the former Brazilian capital, the military body led by General Castello Branco, which the United States supported, and

[23] Marcos Napolitano, *1964: Regime Militar Brasileiro* (São Paulo: Contexto, 2014), 69-72.

the *Comando Supremo da Revolução* (Supreme Command of the Revolution), created by General Costa e Silva, organized the rebel troops, while trying to convince those who were still loyal to the government. General Amaury Kruel, from São Paulo, was one of them. In a phone call with Goulart on the evening of March 31st, Kruel offered his support in exchange for the government distancing itself from social movements and trade unions. Faced with Jango's refusal, the General joined the military coup and sent his troops from São Paulo to Rio. On that point, the majority of the armed forces had adhered to the "Revolution."

On April 1st, President João Goulart flew from Rio de Janeiro to Brasília as a last attempt to negotiate and save his government. Politically isolated, he travelled to Porto Alegre the next day, April 2nd, just before dawn, where his brother-in-law and governor, Leonel Brizola, attempted to organize resistance against the coup. The National Congress declared the presidency of the Republic vacant, and the speaker of the house, Ranieri Mazzilli, was provisionally appointed as the President. Goulart decided not to respond to the coup d'état and crossed the border into Uruguay to seek political asylum. He never returned. In 1964, two decades after the Estado Novo dictatorship (1937-1945), Brazil experienced its second authoritarian period in the 20th century.

These last paragraphs present the main facts that occurred between March 30 and April 2, 1964, and constitute the most widely accepted narrative among academics or even the *Comissão Nacional da Verdade* (National Truth Commission, CNV). Nevertheless, the narratives about the start of the dictatorship differ between those in favour of and against the military regime. In an interview with the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* in the early 2000s, the last Brazilian Field Marshal, Levy Cardoso, said, "On March 31st, at midnight, I was in Costa e Silva's office, with him and (the future military President) Ernesto Geisel, when the victory of the Revolution was declared. It was already past midnight, but to avoid sounding like a joke, Geisel decided to record

it as March 31st."[24] Since then, the armed right has commemorated that day as the beginning of the "Revolution of 1964" or the "Counterrevolution." Nonetheless, Geisel's decision did not prevent some civil sectors from choosing April 1st as the date when the coup d'état occurred to poke fun at the dictatorship; after all, it is April Fools' Day or *Dia da Mentira* in Brazil.[25] In addition to highlighting the debate over the exact date of the coup d'état, this chapter aims to investigate how the armed right has commemorated the anniversary of March 31st.

In this analysis, March 31st (or April 1st) is understood as a place of memory. Pierre Nora coined this concept of *lieux de mémoire* in 1984, observing the transformations of identities in France through physical and symbolic spaces, such as museums, archives, cemeteries, anthems and dates.[26] Nora emphasizes that places of memory inherently possess three dimensions (material, symbolic, and functional), demonstrating that the past portrayed still holds symbolic importance for a group. Although not spatial in definition, dates act as temporal anchors for collective identity, ensuring that specific memories have a "space" on calendars and are remembered anually. On these occasions, one or more groups mobilize themselves to commemorate the chronological landmark through public rituals that can occur in physical or digital places. This memory operation evokes feelings and questions meanings, helping to remember, appropriate, and redefine symbols. In the Brazilian calendar, for example, there are multiple civic or military-civic statutory holidays to enhance a national identity, such Independence Day (September 7th), Proclamation of the Republic's Day (November 15th), and Tiradentes (one of the leaders of the unsuccessful separatist

[24] Cardoso quoted in "Geisel Resolveu Registrar Como 31 de Março," *Folha de São Paulo*, January 14th, 2001.
[25] Regarding this dispute around dates, some scholars set April 2nd as the starting date of the military dictatorship. They argued that on that day the National Congress legally supported the coup d'état, which officially violated the rule of law. See Eneá de Stutz e Almeida, "We Must Remember" (presentation, Democracy in Latin America Series, University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, November 22, 2023).
[26] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations*, no. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring, 1989): 7-24.

movement *Inconfidência Mineira* and since the dictatorship, patron of the civil and military polices) (April 21st). As in other countries in Latin America, these moments are traditionally commemorated in Brazil with military parades, remembering the participation of public forces in these historical events and strengthening (and reminding) the relationship between the army and the nation.[27]

In addition to understanding how a society relates to its memory, scholars note that studying dates as places of memory also enables the analysis of the permanences and changes in the narratives about the past over the years. In the pioneer volume that investigated the "unfortunate" dates created by authoritarian regimes in South America, the Argentinian sociologist Elizabeth Jelin highlighted that chronological landmarks are historical: on the one hand, dates reflect continuities of meanings and, on the other hand, enable the tracking of changes and conflicts surrounding the public memory over time.[28] These repetitions and nuances are observed in the commemorations of the coup d'état in Brazil during the dictatorship and later in the democracy: March 31st takes place every year, but it occurs in different political and social contexts that shape memory and result in a narrative that is neither consensual nor linear.

Since the military dictatorship, the armed forces have taken different approaches to March 31st. The anthropologist Celso Castro observes that the first anniversary of the "Revolution" in 1965 was celebrated in the main Brazilian cities with large military parades and popular gatherings.[29] However, the events in the public sphere became quieter in the following years,

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[27] While analyzing the Peruvian case, Cynthia Milton concurs with the historians Cecilia Méndez and Carla Granados in identifying the predilection of the armed forces for commemorating and studying historical events of the 19th century rather than the 20th century. Chapter 3 will discuss this topic further. See Cynthia Milton, *Conflicted Memory*,12.

[28] Elizabeth Jelin, "Introducción," in *Las Conmemoraciones: Las disputas en las fechas "in-felices*, ed. Elizabeth Jelin (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno, 2002), 12.

[29] Celso Castro, *Exército e Nação: Estudos Sobre a História do Exército Brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro: FGV, 2012), 160.

reflecting the dissent of groups that supported a military coup, but expected the return of power to civilians rather than a dictatorship, such as the liberal press and the political elite. The increasing protests organized by social movements and artistic manifestations against the regime also inhibited the festive tone. Most of the time, including during the "Brazilian miracle,[30]" commemorations of the "Democratic Revolution of 1964" took the form of Catholic masses, soccer matches, school contests, and statements from the Military Ministries to their troops. In these latter speeches, the generals reminded their military subordinates and the population that Brazil needed a military intervention to stop the chaos and save the country from a communist regime. According to the military's narrative, civil society wanted to remove Goulart from power, and the army followed the nation's will; thus, the "Democratic Revolution" avoided bloodshed and fulfilled the nation's desire.[31]

Although the symbolism of 1964 as a moment of national salvation remained present, the central theme of the March 31st commemoration was the idea of progress. The dictatorship promoted the theme in different ways, from military speeches in headquarters (broadcast to civilians via radio only in 1974) to school essay contests. These messages highlighted the economic growth and the modernization of transportation and energy infrastructure as key achievements.[32] Indeed, "Order and Progress," the motto on the national flag since 1889, became

[30] Between 1969-1974, Brazil experienced significant growth due to foreign industrial investment and the use of international capital. Incentives, such as tax reductions, attracted interested companies (mainly linked to the production of durable goods) that enabled the "productivist" model chosen by this government, defined by Maria Helena Moreira Alves as one that aims to accumulate as much capital as possible for the development of the country. This policy left income distribution and the improvement of the population's living conditions in the background, arguing that it was necessary to increase the "pie" to divide it. At that moment, according to the author, the participation of the poor in global income has decreased by 80%. See Maria Helena Moreira Alves, *Estado e Oposição no Brasil (1964 -1984)* (Bauru: Edusc, 2005).

[31] See, Ana Carolina Zimmermann, "O 31 de Março e a Invenção da "Revolução:" Comemorações e Atitudes Sociais nos Aniversários do Golpe de 1964 Durante a Ditadura Militar Brasileira" (MA Thesis. UFMG, 2023).

[32] For example, the construction of President Costa e Silva Bridge, most known as Rio–Niterói Bridge in Rio de Janeiro in 1974; Trans-Amazonian Highway in 1972; and the Itaipu Dam in 1984. These "pharaonic" projects involved huge budgets, corruption and short-term construction. Chapter 3 will discuss some of these cases.

a slogan during the regime. Along with the censorship and the annihilation of the armed opposition, this propaganda created a positive Brazilian image, a collective optimism summarized by the mottos "*Ninguém segura esse país"*(Nobody can stop this country) *and "Brasil: Ame-o ou deixe-o*" (Brazil: love or leave it). In other words, rather than celebrating the figures and circumstances surrounding the regime's origin in 1964, March 31st focused on praising the country's economy and modernization, even though the vast majority of the population benefited little from these economic achievements.

Scholars Carlos Fico, Alessandra Carvalho, and Ludmila da Silva Catela agree that the March 31st commemorations became increasingly restricted to the barracks over time and were less publicly celebrated.[33] The military regime was not interested in discussing the coup d'état publicly; instead, the military Generals preferred to openly commemorate *happier* dates with civic-military ceremonies, such as Labour Day (May 1st) and Independence Day (September 7th). This scenario remained unchanged until the late 1970s, when the military regime had weakened due to the economic crisis caused by plummeting oil prices, the Amnesty Law of 1979, the return of Brazilians from exile, and the growing campaign for democratic elections. Later, by the mid-1980s, the armed forces' statements about March 31st started to acknowledge the victims of attacks perpetrated by guerrilla groups, yet civil society had contrasting opinions. Even the more conservative sectors argued that Brazil's aging dictatorship had already fulfilled its role. In 1985, the Generals finally had to hand over power to civilians, as many had believed would happen much sooner after the 1964 coup.

[33] Carlos Fico, "O Golpe de 1964: Ontem e Hoje" - História da Ditadura. Youtube video, 1:51. March 27, 2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uczeXwSFBf4&t=9s, and Alessandra Carvalho and Ludmila da Silva Catela, "31 de marzo de 1964 en Brasil: memorias deshinlachadas," in *Las conmemoraciones: Las disputas en las fechas"in-felices*," ed. Elizabeth Jelin (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno, 2002), 195-244.

After the transition to democracy, the military headquarters kept the tradition of commemorating March 31st discreetly, although some of its members agreed to participate in academic events and projects discussing the legacies of the dictatorship.[34] In 1995, after the ex-opponent of the dictatorship, FHC became President of the Republic, the three Ministers of the Army, Navy and Air Force decided not to publish any official statement or organize official events in headquarters to encourage the nation's unity.[35] In 1997, the armed forces officially removed March 31st from its annual calendar as a commemorative date. However, this decision did not entirely halt the celebrations of the coup in military spaces: the Military Club in Rio de Janeiro, for example, has continued organizing masses and events in remembrance of the date. Additionally, Carvalho and Catella mention that soldiers in barracks also continue to hear unofficial statements on that date every year. In the democratic era, the persistence of these intramural celebrations demonstrates the defence of the armed forces' role in 1964 and a resistance to the politics of memory that denounced the horror of the dictatorship.

This chapter argues that these internal and underground celebratory practices have begun to emerge in public spaces over the last decade, an unprecedented situation in the Brazilian memory market. With varying degrees of intensity, March 31st has become a place of memory for publicly responding in a pro-coup d'état fashion to contemporary political, economic, and moral concerns, often employing revisionist and negationist strategies regarding the authoritarian past. Every year, groups use this date to share countermemories. According to this concept, coined by

[34] The book *Visões do Golpe*, by Celina D'Araújo, is one example of the rapprochement of academics and military personnel. However, this relationship was not always friendly. Carvalho and Catela also mention the academic event "1964, 30 years later" organized by the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro in March 1994. In the panel "Military and Politics," General Romero Lepesquier and Colonel Guilherme Sodré de Castro denied the practice of torture. Students in the audience called the General a liar, and every time both military avoided questions about torture, a student stood up and poured a bucket of water dyed red. See Carvalho and Catela, "31 de marzo de 1964 en Brasil," 212-213.

[35] In 1999, FHC's government extinguished the three armed forces ministries and created the Ministry of Defence.

Cynthia Milton in her investigation about military memories in Peru, these memories employ counternarratives regarding the victims and state terrorism, often mobilizing the human rights lexicon, such as "truth," "right to remember," and "against forgetting."[36] In the Brazilian case, especially around 2014, March 31st was employed to contest the politics of memory created by the governments of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva (2002-2010) and Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016), their performances and, ultimately, the effectiveness of the civilian democracy initiated in 1985.

The five years analyzed here (2014-2018) covers two administrations: the two last years of the "leftist" government of Dilma Rousseff, the first woman president of Brazil (2014-2016) and, after Rousseff's impeachment, the center-right administration of her Vice President Michel Temer (2016-2018). The starting point for this analysis is the 50th anniversary of the coup d'état in 2014, a round anniversary date, which many scholars consider a pivotal moment of absorption, activation, and especially recapitulation of the celebrated memory.[37] Furthermore, at that moment, the work of the *Comissão Nacional da Verdade* raised an intense debate about the date and its meanings in the public sphere.[38] In the second period, from 2015 to 2018, the conflicting meanings surrounding March 31st persisted. However, a greater number of uncivil voices emerged to oppose the antiheroic memories associated with this date, leading to the election of Jair Bolsonaro as president in 2018.

Regarding methodology, this investigation is chiefly based on analyzing the newspaper coverage of the date. Besides being a vital source to track events, Mariana Joffrey points out that

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[36] Cynthia Milton, *Conflicted Memory*, 31.

[37] Carvalho and Catela, 198.

[38] The *Comissão Nacional da Verdade* (National Truth Commission- CNV) was integrated by 7 experts and investigated human rights violations in Brazil between September 18, 1946 and October 5, 1988. After two years of work, on December 10, 2014 the organism published a final report of three volumes: apparatus of repression, thematic research (violence against workers, Indigenous Peoples, queer community, etc.), and deaths and missing persons. See details: Comissão da Verdade - Memórias Reveladas. https://cnv.memoriasreveladas.gov.br/index.php.

newspapers have become an arena for historiographical disputes around the date since 2004, when the dictatorship began to be discussed more widely by public opinion.[39] Initially, this study also aimed to analyze social media, focusing on X (formerly Twitter), acknowledging the increasingly significant role played by social media in sharing opinions and mobilizing people around particular agendas. However, technical challenges made data harvesting and analysis out of scope.[40]

Three newspapers with high circulation in Brazil were chosen: *Folha de São Paulo*, *O Estado de São Paulo* (also known as *Estadão*), and *O Globo.* Historically, these liberal newspapers supported the 1964 coup d'état and, during the military dictatorship, experienced varying degrees of censorship. In 2014, *Folha, Estadão* and *O Globo* published *mea culpa* editorials acknowledging their misplaced support for the army and criticizing the authoritarian legacy. During the analyzed period, these mass media newspapers adopted a critical stance toward the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers' Party, PT) governments and supported the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff. In a campaign to fix the legacies of the PT administration and implement neoliberal constitutional reforms on public spending, social security, and labour rights, these newspapers also boosted Jair Bolsonaro's candidacy, while acknowledging his antidemocratic side.[41]

The analysis of these sources identified three main groups responsible for promoting authoritarian narratives about March 31st: 1) the armed forces, 2) right and far-right politicians, championed by Bolsonaro, a former army member, and 3) sympathetic civilians as individuals and organizations. These actors can be investigated through the lens of the "uncivil movements," a

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[39] Mariana Joffrey, "Aniversários do Golpe de 1964: Debates Historiográficos, Implicações Políticas," *Revista Tempo E Argumento* 10, n. 23 (January/March 2018), 227.

[40] After becoming X in 2023, the recent Twitter API (V2.0) imposed restrictions and high prices on researchers to pull large amounts of data (over 10K Tweets a month).

[41] Juliana Gagliardi, Camila Quesada Tavares, and Afonso De Albuquerque, "'A Very Difficult Choice": Bolsonaro and Petismo in Brazilian Newspapers," *International Journal of Communication*, Vol. 17 (Jan. 2023): 583-601.

concept coined by Leigh A. Payne to refer to groups that operate to undermine democracy and the values of pluralism and human rights. These groups are called "uncivil" for using violence against rival social movements and democratic governments, which includes intimidation, exclusion and coup attempts. At the same time, they are "movements" because they borrow strategies from social movements to publicly position themselves as autonomous, even when participating in the political system.[42] A key aspect noted by Payne is of particular interest here: how uncivil movements build their identity on exploiting authoritarian cultural symbols to mobilize supporters, legitimating myths. In Brazil, some of these groups are legacies of the military dictatorship: they emerged after 1985, ostensibly to shape democracy, yet they do not support it. This chapter analyzes how these uncivil movements construct and redefine the "cultural stock" of the military regime into their repertoire and what implications this had for the dispute over political power.

2. 2014: Truth Commission and 50 Years After the Coup d'État

The 50th anniversary of the coup d'état of 1964 represented a new chapter for the memories of the military dictatorship. In 2014, there was a growing social interest in the authoritarian period, driven by the works of the CNV and its counterpart commissions in states, cities, and institutions, such as universities. News shows on TV publicized their findings. At the same time, researchers and journalists utilized the Access to Information Act of 2011 to request data about the dictatorship from any public department or agency, including the armed forces, resulting in an increased number of articles and publications on different aspects of the authoritarian period, such as repression and armed and cultural resistance. However, the political and social problems of the Brazilian democracy were in the spotlight. Newspapers reported on the wear and tear of the PT

[42] Leigh A. Payne, *Uncivil Movements: The Armed Right Wing and Democracy in Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 3-37.

administration, targeting the presidential elections scheduled for October of that year. The party faced investigation following the denunciation of two scandals: the vote-buying *scandal of Mensalão* (2005-2015) and the money laundering scandal of *Operação Lava-Jato* (Operation Car Wash), which came to light two weeks before March 31, 2014.

Indeed, from the June 2013 Uprisings onwards, protesters had taken to the streets against the political situation.[43] The sociologist Angela Alonso identified three major "conflict zones" of social and uncivil movements: first, the claim and disagreement, respectively, for deepening the reforms in favour of the poorest segments of the population. Second, there were discussions about moral and collective life, such as the decriminalization of abortion and the moralization of politics regarding corruption. Finally, the limits of legitimate state violence, including public security and the crimes perpetrated during the dictatorship, were a hot topic of debate in Brazilian society.[44] These conflict zones were linked to different projects initiated in the 1980s regarding the reconstruction of the state after the dictatorship. During the transition to democracy, members of social movements, former guerrilla members and militants opposed to the regime, intellectuals, and artists created the PT as an opportunity to bring the social agenda into the institutional sphere. Decades later, part of the social movements and uncivil voices expressed frustration and grievances against the PT government. In the case of uncivil movements, they mobilized narratives pro-military dictatorship to attack the PT administration.

In this way, the findings of the CNV and the tumultuous political climate of 2014 led to an eruption of conflicting and multiple meanings regarding the coup d'état of 1964. In this context,

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[43] From mid-June to July 2013, massive demonstrations erupted across the country. Initially sparked by a R$ 0,20 increase in the transit fare in the city of São Paulo, which was heavily repressed by the police, the protests soon spread to other cities. They channeled the frustration over the public spending on hosting the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games, corruption, the precariousness of public services, and growing distrust in institutional politics. See Marcos Nobre, *Limits of Democracy: From the June 2013 Uprisings in Brazil to the Bolsonaro Government* (Cham: Springer, 2022).

[44] Angela Alonso, *Treze: A Política de Rua de Lula a Dilma* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2023), 85.

different uncivil actors were vocal about the topic and disputed – symbolically and sometimes physically – in newspapers, the national congress, and on the streets with those who denounced the human rights violations during the dictatorship.

"Not Intruders in History"

While a few military reservist members decided to speak to the CNV, others spoke publicly in defence of the armed forces. On March 28, 2014, reporters from *Folha de São Paulo* spoke with General Leônidas Pires Gonçalves. He was Minister of the Army from 1985 to 1990, and played an important role in defending the military autonomy in the Constitution of 1988. The General was also an obstinate memory entrepreneur and was responsible for commissioning the *Orvil* project and the Army's Historical Museum. Almost thirty years later, Pires Gonçalves felt bothered by the "historical naughtiness" and delegitimized the CNV, arguing that "the truth, in quotation marks, is the daughter of power," in this case, of the PT's government.

In general, his interview effectively captured the contradictions surrounding how the armed forces perceive their role in Brazil, the explanation for the 1964 coup d'état, and the definition of democracy. At first, he was questioned why the army had not exercised self-criticism and answered that, "The army is not an intruder on Brazilian history, but an instrument of national will (...) guarantor of law and order."[45] According to Pires Gonçalves, military officers were citizens in uniform who obeyed orders to fulfill their patriotic exercise of violence. In this sense, he took responsibility and accountability away from the army, even though its civic exercise was linked to a state that, between 1964 and 1985, was also governed by the military. In addition, by invoking a "national will," he sought to erase the disputes over power in national politics.

[45] Lucas Ferraz, "Os Militares Nunca Foram Intrusos na História Brasileira," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 28, 2014.

Pires Gonçalves also called the "movement of 1964" an "apparent confusion with a clear definition": the army did what was right, even if that meant self-sacrifice. The General explained that under João Goulart's government, Brazilians would not have democracy or freedom. However, he immediately contradicted himself and admitted that "Jango [Goulart] was nothing like a communist," and, although the army expected confrontation, the President did not have a military troop of his own. For the General, the coup was not a mistake, and the army did a civilized impeachment, "the same thing as the so-called ostracism of Greece." However, both the ancient ostracism and the modern process of impeachment are legislative-based mechanisms, which did not happen in 1964.[46]

Regarding the state violence, Pires Gonçalves stated that "the Revolution" did not kill anyone. Nevertheless, when asked if he acknowledged torture, he confirmed abuses and deaths, but justified that:

> You do not control the human race. I do not like discussing the topic, not because I am proud of the army, but because I think we have more significant problems to look back on. Do you want to stop the country because of four or five dead people? They [the left] won by dubious means. They do not want to talk about subversion; they discuss 1964 only from the perspective of the Revolution. But the Revolution was not clean; we also made mistakes.

In this sense, the army and the coup d'état were above any accountability. He underestimated the victims and treated them as a side effect of the "Revolution" — here, a synonym for the use of violence — that would have brought better consequences to Brazil, such as economic modernization. In his statement, he also mentioned "subversion" to argue for the existence of a war that could justify using any method. As Pires Gonçalves himself noted, Jango

[46] Megan Gannon, "Ancient Greeks Voted to Kick Politicians Out of Athens if Enough People Didn't Like Them," 2020.https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/ancient-athenians-voted-kick-politicians-out-if-enough-people-didnt-them-180976138 (accessed 5 December, 2024).

did not have a personal army with which to fight, and the guerrilla groups lacked the violent apparatus of the armed forces to wage a war.

Between the 1960s and 1980s, the army was preoccupied with asserting that Brazil appeared to be a democratic state, a notion the General also attempted to convey in his 2014 interview. He recalled that the country did not have a dictator, but rather successive presidents, and, although the National Congress elected them indirectly, they were not illegitimate. However, in another moment, he also said, “I am happy to have our democracy; we took 20 years to get here.” In this way, Pires Gonçalves acknowledged that the regime prior to 1985 was not a proper democracy. The army attempted to maintain appearances, for example, by having the National Congress open most of the time and by promulgating a Constitution in 1967. However, this democratic façade quickly fell apart when considering, among other authoritarian practices, the wide control over the institutional opposition and the appointment of state governors and mayors for state capitals and cities deemed strategically significant. Lastly, in his statement, Pires Gonçalves also distorted the meaning of a common expression among the dictatorship's opponents: “After 20 years…,” as if thanking the army for the existence of Brazilian democracy, despite the military being the reason for the interruption of the legal state in Brazil for two decades.

In conclusion, General Leônidas Pires Gonçalves came to the public to deny the CNV findings while acknowledging that any act considered a crime could be justified by the army’s role in the nation. In reaffirming the narrative championed by the barracks that justified the coup d’état, the General argued for the impunity of the army and placed the military institution as a democratic actor.

Conflicted National Congress

A similar dispute over meaning, as demonstrated in Pires Gonçalves' interview, occured at the National Congress in 2014. The Chamber of Deputies of Brazil accepted a request from center-left parties (PT, PCdoB, PDT, PSOL, and PSB) to hold a solemn session repudiating March 31st. At the same time, the Chamber also accepted a separate request from Congressman Jair Bolsonaro (then a member of the PP) to glorify the same date, resulting in a single joint session in Congress. Bolsonaro stated that he would take advantage of the TV Câmara channel's broadcast of the session to demystify what the military period was like. When asked if he did not feel ashamed for talking about a coup in the legislative house, he answered that the chamber was the house of democracy, where contradiction was valid, and everyone had the right to express themselves.[47] He also said he would invite Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra to the ceremony. Also known by the codename Dr. Tibiriçá, Ustra was the head of the DOI-Codi of São Paulo from 1970 to 1974, when there was a report of torture every 60 hours. In 2008, he was the first military personnel considered a torturer by the Brazilian justice system, yet he became an idol for the military dictatorship supporters, including Bolsonaro.[48]

The ceremony, held on April 1st, 2014, ended in confusion. At first, the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Deputies was absent, and Bolsonaro demanded to lead the session as the longest-serving deputy. After many arguments, the House Speaker, Henrique Alves, and other board members arrived one hour later. Alves opened the session and stated that the House would not tolerate demonstrations legitimizing the military regime. He quickly headed out to attend to other commitments and left the other board members in charge. At the beginning of the session, Bolsonaro's staff and people in favour of the dictatorship, mostly relatives of elder military

[47] "Câmara Dará Espaço a Visões Opostas Sobre Golpe", *Folha de São Paulo,* March 16, 2014.
[48] "Carlos Brilhante Ustra (Major Tibiriçá)," *Memórias da Ditadura.* https://memoriasdaditadura.org.br/personagens/carlos-brilhante-ustra-major-tibirica/, accessed on July 8, 2024.

members, put up a banner in the galleries with the words, "Congratulations military, March 31st, 64. Thanks to you, Brazil is not Cuba." Deputies and part of the public present booed the former captain. After the speeches opposing the dictatorship, Bolsonaro took to the podium, holding a copy of *A Verdade Sufocada - A História Que a Esquerda Não Quer Que o Brasil Conheça* (*The Suffocated Truth: The Story that the Left Does Not Want Brazil to Know*), written by Ustra in 2006. Ustra's book juxtaposes historical narratives about the left-wing actions in Brazil from the 1930s to the first Lula government with Ustra's memories as an army officer during the dictatorship. However, the majority of the deputies prevented Bolsonaro from speaking: they held posters with photos of the forced disappeared people during the regime, and banners written "the voice that praises the dictatorship silenced the voice of the citizenship." They turned their backs to Bolsonaro and sang the national anthem.[49] The person in charge of the session, Senator Amir Lando, asked these deputies to face forward. Bolsonaro tried to convince Lando to allow him to speak anyway because "they would hear some truths in the same way," and he would "torture" them from the podium.[50] Unable to control the situation, Lando ended the session.

The institutional reaction to this episode was striking. According to Mozart Viana, General Secretary of the board, having deputies with their backs to Bolsonaro and the board members was disrespectful to the Legislative body and democracy itself. The speaker, Alves, expressed regret for the situation. He highlighted that the Chamber statute did not condone such behaviour and that the deputies broke the rules by not giving the floor to Bolsonaro. Even if they disagreed with his perspective, he had the right to speak.[51]

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[49] "Sessão na Câmara e Ato no Rio Sobre 1964 Acabam em Tumulto," *O Estado de São Paulo*, April 2, 2014.
[50] "Sessão na Câmara Sobre 1964 Acaba em Bate-Boca," *O Globo*, April 2, 2014.
[51] "Deputado Elogia Golpe e Tumultua Sessão na Câmara Sobre Ditadura," *Folha de São Paulo*, April 2, 2014.

This episode demonstrated a lack of institutional authority: had the house allowed Bolsonaro to give a statement, there was no doubt that he would have argued in support of the dictatorship. Later, the Chamber did not punish him even for the banner praising the military dictatorship nor for his threat of "torturing" the other deputies, which violated the Speaker's position of not tolerating such a pro-dictatorship argument. Instead, the House criticized those who spoke out against Bolsonaro. This situation raises questions about the limits of the so-called "freedom of speech" and whether all discourses should have a place in democracy. Until this date, Brazil had no legislation that forbade or criminalized the defence of the return of the military dictatorship or new institutional ruptures.

Uncivil Voices Take to the Streets

Despite the tumult in the Chamber of Deputies, Bolsonaro's speeches found echoes in civil society, among those who shared the same nostalgia for the authoritarian years. In addition to academic conferences, social actors decided to reenact key historical events that occurred before the 1964 coup d'état. Social movements decided to organize the Rally at the Central do Brasil in Rio, and uncivil movements held the March of the Family with God for Liberty in 41 cities[52] *Folha de São Paulo* interviewed the organizers for São Paulo's edition of the March, Bruno Toscano and Cristina Peviano, 40 and 51 years old respectively, who were born and raised during the

[52] Also known as the Reforms Rally, the event took place outside the Central do Brasil station in Rio de Janeiro on March 13, 1964. Speaking to a crowd of between 150,000 and 200,000 people, João Goulart reaffirmed his commitment to implementing reforms in the tax, political, educational, urban, and agrarian sectors. He also signed two expropriation decrees: one for private oil refineries and another for under-utilized properties on the banks of federal highways and dams. To demonstrate their disagreement against these measures, on March 19, 1964, uncivil movements formed by São Paulo upper-class gathered 200,000 at the March of the Family with God for Liberty, carrying banners such as "It's time for Jango to leave" "Red, only lipstick." Other demonstrations happened across the country in the following weeks. Elio Gaspari, *A Ditadura Envergonhada: As Ilusões Armadas* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2004), 47- 48.

dictatorship. Their statements reflected the historical narrative about the military regime adjusted for that new reality: a new coup d'état in 2014 was needed to save Brazil from corruption.

According to the organizers, a military intervention was seen as the solution to halt an alleged "ongoing Communist Revolution scheduled for sometime in 2014." The armed forces could also address corruption within the political system. Toscano, who also belonged to the uncivil group *Revoltados Online*, vaguely explained that a provisional government would be formed after seizing power, and that new elections would be held. However, when asked about suitable candidates for this new regime, he replied that all politicians in power at the time were useless, and it would take effort to name them. He did not mention Bolsonaro.

For Cristina Peviano, pinning her hope on the army was a clear choice: she had not seen any general who died a millionaire. A corruption-free dictatorship is one of the strongest arguments among those who recall the regime with nostalgia, supporting the army as a solution. However, the absence of reports about corruption in the news in the 1970s and 1980s did not mean that bribery did not exist. Researchers pointed out cases of illicit enrichment through confiscation of property belonging to opponents of the regime and monumental public works, such as the Transamazônica highway, the hydroelectric plants in Itaipu (border between Brazil and Paraguay), Balbina (Amazonas) and Tucuruí (Pará), the nuclear power plant in Angra dos Reis, and the bridge Rio-Niterói.[53] In addition to the censorship imposed on the media, inspection and audit bodies did not function widely during that period.

[53] See José Carlos de Assis, *A Chave do Tesouro, Anatomia dos Escândalos Financeiros no Brasil: 1974/83* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1983); Pedro Henrique Pedreira Campos, *Estranhas Catedrais: As Empreiteiras Brasileiras e a Ditadura Civil-Militar, 1964-1988* (Rio de Janeiro: Eduff, 2014); Diego Knack, *Ditadura e Corrupção: A Comissão Geral de Investigações e o Confisco de Bens de Acusados de Enriquecimento Ilícito no Brasil (1968-1978)* (Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional, 2018).

When confronted about the human rights violations during the regime, Peviano questioned the interviewer, "I don't even know if they [militaries] adopted it [torture]. Because the folks who said they were tortured are so fat, so strong, so beautiful, eh? I saw them in the [São Paulo Truth] Commission, they did not even have a mark."[54] Her opinion is another common place among military supporters: they deny or underestimate the human rights violations even when confronted by evidence. According to their belief, the status of the victim of the regime is conditioned by physical injuries, ignoring the psychological damage of the abuses. This kind of thinking also places those who were persecuted stuck in the past, as if they do not have the right to move on and overcome the trauma.

The March of the Family with God for Liberty had 700 attendees in São Paulo. The organizers made speeches on top of a *trio elétrico* (a carnival truck) with a statue of Our Lady of Fátima and a banner that read *"FFAA já!* (Armed Forces now!)." In Rio, 150 participants attended. In both cities, there was a confrontation between the uncivil participants and individuals in the street who were against the military dictatorship.[55] Although the events did not attract a huge attendance, they represented a significant shift in public perception: people no longer had concerns about expressing nostalgia for the regime, and began organizing community events to celebrate it.

The newspaper coverage of 2014 reported other situations that exposed the conflicts of meaning about the date. For instance, at the Law School of the University of São Paulo, Professor Eduardo Lobo Botelho Gualazzi argued that the coup of 1964 was necessary during a lecture and had his class invaded by students in protest.[56] In the same week, the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* organized a panel to discuss the 50th anniversary of the coup d'état and invited the journalist and

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[54] "Grupo Organiza Nova Edição de Passeata Anticomunista de 64," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 16, 2014.
[55] "Manifestantes Contra e a Favor da Ditadura Militar Marcham em SP," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 23, 2014.
[56] "Professor da USP Defende Golpe e Alunos Invadem Aula," *O Estado de São Paulo*, April 2, 2014 and "Professor Faz Apologia a Regime e Tem Aula Interrompida na USP," *Folha de São Paulo,* 2 de abril de 2014.

the former guerrilla member Mariluce Moura, the historian Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta and General Luiz Eduardo Rocha Paiva. Moura explained that, while she was pregnant, both she and her husband, Gildo Macedo Lacerda, were kidnapped, arrested, and tortured in 1972. Gildo was murdered. The General argued that there were no reasons for the army to ask for apologies and named people who were killed by the armed struggle and "were never remembered or granted financial reparations."[57]

These episodes, along with General Leônidas Pires Gonçalves' interview, Bolsonaro's manifestation in the Chamber of Deputies, and the organization of the Marches of the Family with God for Liberty, demonstrated that narratives supporting the dictatorship gained traction in the public sphere. They had existed "underground" since the transition to democracy, but came to light after 2014, starting to find a more comfortable place in the public eye, even amid criticism. Additionally, this glorification of the military dictatorship has since served another social function: to recall a past that could serve as a model for addressing the present's problems.

3. 2015-2018: The Clamour of Uncivil Voices

The 2014 analysis identified narratives and procedures repeated and enhanced in the following years. Between 2015 and 2018, the conflicting meanings around March 31st still existed, but newspapers increasingly reported on (or chose to give more pages to) uncivil voices.

In October 2014, Dilma Rousseff was re-elected with 51.1% amidst an anti-campaign that discredited her as a criminal and terrorist for being a former guerrilla member during the military dictatorship. Her victory did not stop center-right and right-wing parties, mass media, and civil groups from continuing to attack Rousseff and the PT.

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[57] "Falta de Punição para Crimes da Ditadura Militar Polariza Debate," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 26, 2014.

In this section, four uncivil actors illustrate how different groups used narratives about the military regime to enhance and respond to the political crisis of that period. As a result, Brazil underwent a process that ultimately led to the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018.

Demonstrations and the Military Club in Rio

In 2015, the beginning of Rousseff's second term was marked by the ongoing Operation Car Wash, which exposed a corruption scheme at the state-owned oil company Petrobras. At the same time, the President faced a severe economic crisis, which led to cutbacks in social spending. On March 13, 2015, social movements organized a rally to defend Petrobras and Rousseff's government. That date was chosen as a reference to the Reforms Rally, which took place on the same day in 1964, when João Goulart and his supporters gathered to show their support for the elected government.

As a response to this demonstration, uncivil movements, such as *Revoltados Online*, *MBL*, and *Vem Pra Rua*,[58] scheduled a protest on March 15th, the following Sunday, and nearly 1 million people gathered in 70 cities to demand Rousseff's impeachment.[59] However, some participants called for the President to be overthrown from her position by a military intervention or for impeachment to be followed by a military government.[60] Aparecido de Duca, 51 years old, one of the leaders of the *SOS Forças Armadas* movement, argued that an intervention was not a coup and

[58] On its website, MBL presents itself as a liberal movement that advocates for individual freedom, private property and the rule of law. "Valores e Princípios," *MBL Website*, https://mbl.org.br/valores-principios (Accessed 5 October 2024). Movimento Vem Pra Rua arose in 2014 and called itself a non-partisan movement aiming to mobilize outraged people to build a new way to make politics. Their website and social medias are no longer active. "Vem para Rua," NEAMP, https://neamp.pucsp.br/organizacoes/movimento-vem-pra-rua (Accessed 5 October 2024).
[59] "Nearly a million march to oust Brazil's president," *CBC News*, March 15, 2015.
[60] "Caras da Avenida," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 16, 2015.

that the armed forces were the only solution to an entire government being taken over by corruption.[61] *SOS Forças Armadas* demanded a 90-day military government that would dismiss the National Congress, take corrupt politicians to the Superior Military Court and create right-wing parties to govern Brazil.[62] This view neither acknowledged nor trusted institutional channels as a possibility for change or accountability, while reinforcing the narrative that the armed forces were above the Constitution. Echoing 1964, certain sectors once again sought to use the military as a means to reshape the political system in line with their uncivil ideologies and interests, in the hope that the armed forces would sanitize and restore power to the "right" groups.

Almost two weeks later, on March 31st, some civilians who had attended the protests on March 15 also demonstrated support for the coup d'état celebrations at the Military Club in Rio. The scenario differed from the previous year: in 2014, the Military Club persisted with its celebrations of March 31st. However, to avoid eventual left-wing protests, it organized the event in Barra da Tijuca, a non-easily accessible neighbourhood, far from its head office in downtown.[63] In 2015, a small pro-military demonstration took place outside the head office, demonstrating the growing visibility of uncivil voices and their support for the military. Founded in 1887, the Military Club operates nationally as a not-for-profit association that represents the armed forces, offering social, sporting, assistance, cultural, and recreational activities for members of the armed forces. Being a not-for-profit organization, the Military Club acts as a "civil space" for the military, where the prohibitions on the 1964 celebrations are not applicable, and they can "valuably discuss major

[61] I did not find any information about the SOS Forças Armadas movement on the literature and social media, including in public profiles of the leader cited in the sources.
[62] "'Impeachment Não Vai Adiantar' Diz Líder Pró-Intervenção Militar," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 16, 2015.
[63] "Longe do Centro, Clube Militar Celebra Golpe," *O Estado de São Paulo*, April 1, 2014.

national issues, seeking solutions to Brazilian problems" through panels, campaigns and conferences.[64]

During the commemorative lunch for March 31st, the Club president, General Gilberto Pimentel, delivered a speech entitled "We do not have the right to forget," a slogan often associated with the struggle of victims of state terrorism to claim memory and justice. In this case, the General appropriated this lexicon, blaming scholars for overlooking the consequences of the Soviet-supported governments in other parts of the world. He stated that "forgetting 1964 was an attitude of moral and intellectual capitulation" because it hid the heroic role of the armed forces in preventing the creation of a syndicalist republic and the dictatorship of the proletariat.[65] These classifications resonated with the criticisms made by uncivil movements regarding Lula, a former union leader, and the PT administration, which they labelled as Communist, creating a parallel between 1964 and the current political moment.

Continuing his speech, Pimentel reminded the fellow military members that, a few weeks earlier, the Military Club had launched a "national morality campaign" to discuss Brazil's political situation. General Pimentel argued that the project was against military intervention because, unlike in 1964, society and the press did not call for the military to intervene. At the opening event, the businessman James Akel started his speech by calling Rousseff and her Minister of Defence, Jacques Wagner, "guerrilleros" and stated, "whatever we have to do for morality must be done. Impeachment is not a coup."[66]

While impeachments are not inherently coups, they can function as such. Rousseff's case exemplifies this debate. Political scientist Danilo Enrico Martuscelli, after analyzing the

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[64] Clube Militar, "Clube Militar: A Casa da República: "Apresentação," https://clubemilitar.org/o-clube/ (Accessed 20 November 2024).
[65] "No Rio, Clube Militar Comemora Aniversário de 51 Anos do Golpe" *Folha de São Paulo*, April 1, 2015.
[66] "Clube Militar Lança Campanha por "Moralidade," Mas Nega Golpismo," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 20, 2015.

scholarship on the subject, identified that authors supporting the impeachment thesis argue that the constitutional criteria were met. First, a crime of responsibility, "fiscal pedaling" and the issuance of decrees authorizing the release of supplementary credits without prior approval from the legislature, had occurred. Also, two-thirds of the National Congress accepted the charges, demonstrating that the procedures were followed.[67] Moreover, this process did not employ violence or disrupt the democratic order. However, Martuscelli and other scholars, such as Lorena Soler and Florencia Prego, argue that coups in the 21st century rely on constitutional instruments rather than violent weapons. In Neo-Golpismo (a movement in favour of a return to coup d'états), right-wing groups in civil society generate instability and resort to the Legislative and Judicial branches to employ political and legal tools to restore "order," often against popular sovereignty. Although the military component has some relevance, the seizure of government does not happen through military intervention, as happened during the Cold War.[68]

Both the March 15th demonstration and the event at the Military Club reflected Neo-Golpismo. Although the "fiscal pedaling" had been used before by other federal, state and municipal governments, these administrations did not suffer any accountability, indicating in this case a casualty use of the legislation. In this way, these two examples demonstrate how these groups reinterpreted March 31st in light of the contemporary political context (distrust in the institutions and representatives) and strategies while emphasizing the use of the impeachment mechanism for uncivil purposes. *SOS Forças Armadas*, for instance, envisioned the armed forces

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[67] Mastuscelli defined *Pedaladas fiscais* (Fiscal pedaling) as the fiscal maneuvers carried out by the government, not provided by law, which consisted of delaying the transfer of funds from the National Treasury to public and private banks in order to ease or sustain the government's fiscal situation for a certain period. "Danilo Enrico Martuscelli, "Polêmicas sobre a Definição do Impeachment de Dilma Rousseff Como Golpe de Estado," *Revista de Estudos e Pesquisas sobre as Américas* 14, no.2 (2020): 69.

[68] Lorena Soler and Florencia Prego, "The Right and Neo-Golpismo in Latin America: A Comparative Reading of Honduras (2009), Paraguay (2012) and Brazil (2016)," in *Democracy and Brazil: Collapse and Regression*, ed. Bernardo Bianchi, Jorge Chaloub, Patricia Rangel, and Frieder Otto Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2020).

intervening and holding politicians accountable, though not aligned with democracy. As in other moments of republican history in Brazil, civilians called on the armed forces in hopes of sanitizing the government. In its turn, the Military Club embraced the idea, although it proposed that the military could play its role in a "soft" manner. Although this is not the role of the military in a democracy, General Pimentel suggested that rather than using weapons, the institution could act as one of the right-wing agents seeking the president's removal. The Military Club could also serve as a space to host and build alliances with other uncivil movements, such as entrepreneurs, in the name of morality. Together, these movements revealed how the armed right memories of the dictatorship and were reactivated to legitimize interventions in the political order.

The Impeachment and the Rise of Bolsonaro

In December 2015, political negotiations led the Chamber of Deputies to accept an impeachment petition accusing Rousseff of disregarding the Brazilian federal budget. According to Danilo Martuscelli and Marcos Napolitano, this episode of Neo-Golpismo resulted from the convergence internal actors in the state (institutional crisis between powers, PSDB questioning of the 2014 elections result, lack of support from the then PMDB, and political use of the Operation Car Wash), uncivil protests with an anti-party speech (in particular against the PT and left-wing parties), and the social support from the upper-middle class triggered by the redistributive advances in the PT administration.[69]

Two weeks after March 31st, 2016, 66.67% of the federal deputies cast their votes in favour of the president's removal from office, based on moral concerns rather than administrative misconduct, as permitted by the 1988 Constitution, thus paving the way for an impeachment

[69] Marcos Napolitano, "Golpe de Estado: Entre o Nome e a Coisa," *Estudos Avançados* 33, no 96 (2019): https://doi.org/10.1590/s0103-4014.2019.3396.0020.

process. Deputies mostly justified their vote as being against corruption in the government (without explaining to which corruption they referred), human rights and queer agenda, and communism, and in favour of God and the family.[70] Only eight members mentioned "fiscal pedaling."[71]

Among the 516 deputies, the national and international press drew attention to Jair Bolsonaro's vote. In addition to citing God, family, and freedom, he justified his vote by mentioning 1964. According to Bolsonaro, "They lost in 1964, they lost now in 2016," drawing a parallel between João Goulart and the sectors that supported his democratically elected government, and Dilma, and the PT administration. In his speech, Bolsonaro dedicated his vote in honour of the armed forces, the controversial figure of Luís Alves de Lima e Silva, the Duke of Caxias, the patron of the Brazilian army, and — the most shocking to the press — Colonel Carlos Brilhante Ustra, referring to him as "the terror of Dilma."[72] Over the years, Bolsonaro had frequently praised Ustra, such as during the solemn ceremony marking the 50th anniversary of the coup d'état in 2014. However, this case was highly symbolic: at a decisive moment for Brazilian democracy, the uncivil posture of Bolsonaro repeated the violence and trauma of the past by attacking a torture survivor while honouring a recognized perpetrator. He used the Chamber of Deputies not only to glorify the military dictatorship but also to promote and legitimize authoritarian values.

Although criticized, Bolsonaro was never punished for this speech; on the contrary, he was celebrated for legitimazing the voices of supporters of the military dictatorship in public opinion.

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[70] See Carla Bonato Marcolin, Fernanda da Sila Momo, João Luiz Becker, and Ariel Behr, "Text Mining for Discourse Analysis: Themes and Arguments of the Deputies' Voting Decision During the Impeachment Vote," *Revista Alcance* 26, no 1 (January/April 2019): 4-12.
[71] Martuscelli, "Polêmicas sobre a Definição do Impeachment de Dilma Rousseff Como Golpe de Estado," 70.
[72] "Bolsonaro exalta Ustra na votação do impeachment em 2016," Estadão. YouTube Video, 0:58. August 8, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xiAZn7bUC8A.

As historian Rebecca Atencio observed, Bolsonaro encouraged public interest in Ustra by portraying him as an ideological father figure, resulting in Ustra's book, *The Suffocated Truth,* becoming a bestseller among uncivil actors, especially the armed forces. For Bolsonaro, the impeachment voting session was a turning point that paved his way to becoming a candidate in the presidential election.[73] In April 2016, he accounted for 8% of voting intentions for the presidency;[74] two years later, he won the election runoff with 55,13%.

Celebrating the Coup d'état on the Newspaper Pages

In addition to street demonstrations and events at the Military Club, which have occurred consistently since then, the Letter to the Editor section of the newspapers analyzed also exemplifies the rise of uncivil voices. In 2014, the editors published readers' messages that reflected the conflicting meanings of March 31st; in 2015, nostalgic voices from the regime dominated the publication, and between 2016 and 2018 they were the only narrative published. In addition to political maneuvers, the military was the leading provider of symbolic material for these groups.

Among those voices, M.M.H. provides a consistent example of this new context. The reader had their letters published in *Folha de São Paulo* between 2014 and 2019 and encapsulated the central myths in the military cultural stock. This reader's messages have a distinct tone and resemble an anniversary card handed around March 31st, with the texts beginning with

[73]"Rebecca Atencio, "In The Name of the Father: Uncovering the Paternity Of Military Memories of Dictatorship in Brazil," in *How the Military Remembers: Human Rights and Countermemories in Latin America*, ed. Cynthia Milton and Michael J. Lazzara (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2025), 23-24.
[74] "Voto De Bolsonaro Para Ustra Ganha Destaque Internacional," *Folha de São Paulo*, April 20, 2016.

compliments like “Thank you, 1964” or “Congratulations [on your anniversary], 1964.”[75] The analysis of the messages identified that M.M.H. employed three narratives to compare past and present Brazil.

Modernization was the main topic. A qualitative analysis of M.M.H.’s letters using the open-source software Taguette highlighted the prominence of the words “development,” “industrialization,” and “employment.” M.M.H. drew on the 1970s developmentalist vision to criticize the crisis of the 2010s neoliberal economy, evoking the dictatorship’s investments in infrastructure, such as heavy industries, to support industrialization. In many passages, the reader also argued that the military regime provided full employment for Brazilians. However, at the same time, M.M.H. also noted labour policies introduced during the period that favoured greater job rotation and instability, such as the PIS and PASEP. [76] According to the reader, this prosperous past contrasts with the reality of the 2010s, marked by deindustrialization, scientific and technological dependence on “developed” nations, 12 million unemployed Brazilians, and a low-skilled workforce. The explanation was that if the PT and Temer’s governments failed to advance economic development and industrialization, it was because the administrations were “dishonest, corrupt and thought only in their personal interests.”

Echoing what was voiced on the streets, M.M.H. also attacked corruption in the current government, arguing that it did not happen between 1964 and 1985. Throughout the letters, the reader praised the military presidents as great statesmen and emphasized that none of them enriched themselves while in office. In contrast, current politicians would have betrayed Brazil, and the corruption and deindustrialization would not be forgotten. “History would tell.”

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[75] Carta dos Leitores, *Folha de São Paulo*, April 1, 2014; March 31, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019.

[76] *Programa de Integração Social* (Social Integration Program, PIS) and *Programa de Formação do Patrimônio do Servidor Público* (Public Servant’s Property Fund Program, PASEP) are tax contributions by employers to pay employees’severance pays).

The third trend was the explicit narrative that defended the coup d'état. M.M.H. quoted the former Minister of Planning, Roberto Campos (1964-1967), who said that Brazil had two choices in 1964: "Years of Lead," as the military dictatorship is commonly known, or Rivers of Blood," what a left-wing dictatorship would represent. M.M.H. cited as examples the victims of governments in the USSR, China and Cuba, using Socialism and Communism as synonymous. The reader also denounced an alleged persecution of everything that was not left-wing in Latin America. Along with their admiration for the economy and the alleged absence of corruption, M.M.H. concluded that the military dictatorship was the best option for Brazil. Another reader, O.R.D., declared being horrified with those who were against the coup and endorsed M.M.H. 's words: "only bad Brazilians, communists, and terrorists had their blood, sweat and tears dropped" during the regime.[77]

In 2019, M.M.H. wrote:

> "Congratulations, 1964! Congratulations on the true Brazilian industrial revolution; on the generals and the Marshal of the revolution, Castelo Branco - makers of time - essential figures of those times-; on General Ernesto Geisel; on Brazilian industry - without heavy industry and consequent industrialization, any nation in the world can call itself industrialized[78]."

In this message, the reader praised the 1964 coup d'état, Castelo Branco for starting the "Revolution," and the Geisel administration for its investments in heavy industry. They did not criticize Brazil's current economic situation or mention corruption, perhaps because Brazil's new president shared their views. 2019 was also M.M.H.'s last entry in *Folha de São Paulo*. This could be for several reasons, but two plausible ones are that the newspaper changed its guidelines and avoided publishing readers' pro-military opinions. After 2019, such arguments also disappeared from *O Estado de São Paulo* and *O Globo*. Another possibility is that M.M.H. followed Bolsonaro

[77] "Carta dos Leitores," *Folha de São Paulo*, April 3, 2015.
[78] "Carta dos Leitores, *Folha de São Paulo*, 2019.

in his persecution of liberal media and found *Folha*'s Letters to the Editor an inappropriate channel for sharing their ideas, so they moved to alternative spaces, such as social media. In any case, 2019 marked the start of a new cycle in the memories of the military dictatorship in Brazil.

4. Conclusion

The 2013 protests led to the rise of several uncivil movements in urban centers. Initially focused on advancing social justice demands, these street protests were replaced by anti-parties and anti-politics agendas, grounded on criticism of the PT's social policies, progressive policies, and corruption scandals. These groups also gained support from part of the population disillusioned with the government and democracy itself. The administrations since 1985 have not resolved the structural problems in Brazilian society, nor maintained the privileges of traditional sectors. This context prompted certain groups to call for a return to authoritarian times or to advocate for authoritarian solutions. As Jelin notes, in the impossibility of settling accounts with the past, old and new actors rethink their interpretation of the past, working on its meaning in the present.[79]

Over the following four years, these groups rose in power, and the place of memory March 31 served as a lens through which to observe their performance in the public sphere. Following Payne's indicators of uncivil movements' power, the Brazilian case met the four criteria she put forward in her study: although these tools are not uncivil for definition, they are used by these actors to undermine democracy. First, these groups have gained mass media coverage since 2013. The analysis demonstrated, for example, how armed forces members posiotioned themselves as political actors outside the barracks without renouncing their military status. They engaged in

[79] Jelin, *Los trabajos de la memoria*, 12.

political discussions in the present while exhorting their dictatorship legacy in the legislature, media, and social spaces. They also incorporated vocabulary from human rights discourses and memory debates at the same time that they undermined the practice of torture and the deaths during the dictatorship.

Second, these groups could have their concerns indirectly represented through elected politicians at the federal level. In this way, the period from 2014 to 2018 enabled us to witness the transformation of Bolsonaro into a symbol. In 2014, the newspaper's headlines referred to him as the "Deputy, who praises [the] coup [of 1964], disrupts Chamber session on dictatorship,"
not identifying him by name. Those who felt nostalgia for the dictatorship and urged its return also did not mention him in their speeches as their representative. Over the following years, Bolsonaro embodied their symbolic discourses and aspirations. In the memory market, he both targeted patrons who were already interested in military memory goods and presented the armed right memories as a solution for those disillusioned with the PT administration and democracy. In this first moment, regarding the transactions in this market, the primary memory-makers, the armed forces, gained value. The patrons, in addition to buying Ustra's books and shirts with his face after the impeachment vote and, later, to support Bolsonaro during the 2018 elections, gained in return validation, moral, and a representative in the executive branch who gave them hope.[80] While in 2011, Bilbija and Payne indicated the existence of "memory promoters," in 2025, perhaps a more appropriate label for Bolsonaro is a *memory influencer* for his strong online presence, interaction with his followers/ customers, and capacity to influence and sell ideas (and goods).[81]

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[80] Most of these shirts portrays an 80-years old Ustra in his session with the CNV, on May 10, 2013. He wears sunglasses and a black suit. He has a serious expression and looks like Augusto Pinochet. Along with his profile picture, the caption *Ustra Vive* (Ustra lives). "Fãs Usam Imagem de Torturador para Promover Bolsonaro," *Congresso em Foco*, July 4, 2018.

[81] According to the Oxford English dictionary, influencer is "a person who has the ability to influence other people's decisions about the purchase of particular goods or services," "a person who has become well-known through use of the internet and social media, and uses celebrity to endorse, promote, or generate interest in specific products, brands,

Third, uncivil groups mobilized deputies and the judicial power and successfully overthrew Rousseff from office in a Neo-Golpismo coalition. Michel Temer, Rousseff's vice-president, assumed the presidency, and one of his first decisions was to eliminate the Ministry of Women, Racial Equality, Youth and Human Rights, cutbacks in social programs and policies and reform the pensions and retirement programs.[82] Fourth and last, in 2016, members of these uncivil groups joined political parties to run for municipal office. The 2018 elections consolidated their presence in the Legislative Assemblies and the Chamber of Deputies in Brasilia, a scenario that has been increasing in recent years. This political articulation was essential in reorganizing the right wing and forming what is now known as *Nova Direita* (New Right) in Brazil.

etc., often for payment." I highlighted the word "often" because one can start their "influence career" advertising goods "for free," aiming to find partners, attract followers, and gain their own public visibility. I think this idea is useful to understand the differences between Bolsonaro and the armed forces, which is discussed in Chapter 2. Oxford English Dictionary, "Influencer," https://www.oed.com/dictionary/influencer_n?tl=true (accessed 10 November 2025).

[82] Soler and Prego, "The Right and Neo-Golpismo in Latin America,"72.

Chapter 2: The Uses and Abuses of Memory: The Bolsonaro "Post-Truth" Years (2019-2022)

1. Introduction

Bolsonaro's defence of the military dictatorship dates back to the beginning of his political career in 1991. According to the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo,* while serving as a federal deputy between 2001 and 2018, Bolsonaro addressed the military regime in one in every four speeches.[83] Thus, it was logical that once president, he used pro-dictatorship terminology in official publications and encouraged nationalistic events to promote the historical narratives of the armed right-wing.

In this regard, the Bolsonaro administration (2019-2022) represented a turning point in the debates about the memory of the military dictatorship in the country. As in other Latin American countries that experienced authoritarian regimes or civil wars, Brazil has mostly associated memory with truth in a post-conflict context. The act of remembering the recent past means discussing human rights violations committed in that period and demanding justice in the present.[84] This memory debate has changed in the past decade: while writing the article *"Recordar É Viver"* in 2015, the historian Marcos Napolitano observes that a greater number of voices defending the

[83] "Regime Foi Tema de 1/4 dos Discursos" *O Estado de São Paulo*, March 31, 2019.
[84] Elizabeth Jelin, *Los Trabajos de la Memoria*, 71.

armed rights'memories began to challenge the pro-human rights narratives in the public sphere. That was an unprecedented phenomenon since the transition in 1985. According to Napolitano, at least at that moment, the far right lacked institutional and political respect, a condition necessary to make their memory official. [85] Indeed, as demonstrated in Chapter 1, between 2014 and 2018, uncivil voices gained increasing importance in the public space, utilizing March 31st to establish positive narratives about the military dictatorship as the new truth and hegemonic memory. These actors were also electorally successful in 2016 and 2018, and this process reached its peak with Bolsonaro's election as President, whose government broadly shared and legitimized the coup d'état of 1964.

Bolsonaro's approach to March 31st is also situated within the post-truth context. This concept became popular after Donald Trump's first election and the Brexit referendum in 2016, amid the widespread of falsehoods. In the post-truth era, there is a dismissal of experts and factual evidence and distrust of institutions and traditional media. The notion of "alternative facts" illustrates how reality can be distorted to serve political ends.[86] Whereas in post-conflict settings truth is associated with shedding light on violations and promoting accountability, in the post-truth era it becomes ambiguous, fragmentary, and open to interpretation. This vagueness creates fertile ground for the manipulation of history and the spread of conspiratorial theories.[87]

Regarding the politics of memory, Bolsonaro's administration combined both old and new practices. The mechanisms established between 1995 and 2015 to provide reparations and

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[85] Marcos Napolitano, "Recordar É Viver," 17; 36-37.

[86] Ernesto Perini-Santos, "What is Post-Truth? A Tentative Answer with Brazil as a Case Study," in *Democracy and Brazil: Collapse and Regression*, ed. Bernardo Bianchi, Jorge Chaloub, Patricia Rangel, and Frieder Otto Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2021), 228-229.

[87] Paolo Demuru, "Conspiracy Theories, Messianic Populism and Everyday Social Media Use in Contemporary Brazil: a Glocal Semiotic Perspective," *Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics and Innovation* 42, no 3 (2020), https://doi.org/10.12893/gjcpi.2020.3.12..

accountability for victims of the military regime were either appropriated by Bolsonaro's administration to promote counternarratives or were discontinued.[88] In terms of symbolic dates, he mobilized September 7th (Independence Day) and April 19th (Army Day), appropriating colonial history to also promote the idea of a nation under threat and the armed forces as its saviours. As discussed in Chapter 1, historiography on dates as places of memory during the dictatorship highlighted that the military regime preferred "happier" dates to convey nationalist messages. Bolsonaro was aware of this strategy and was inspired, particularly by September 7th, 1972, to mobilize these other commemorations for his own political purposes.[89] As a novelty, he institutionalized March 31st as an official commemoration. After 20 years of a politics of memory that opposed the 1964 coup, a democratically elected government would officially commemorate that event.

In this sense, my research will continue the investigation begun in Chapter 1 on March 31st and argue that the analysis of March 31st demonstrates how Bolsonaro's administration not only used but also abused of the memories about the military dictatorship, which unveiled disputes and discomforts between the then-President and the armed forces. The concept of "uses and abuses of memory" was first explored by the Bulgarian-French historian and philosopher Tzvetan Todorov, specifically in relation to the memories of 20th century atrocities. In remembering the past, the

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[88] Bolsonaro's administration systematically attacked and weakened the Comissão Especial sobre Mortos e Desaparecidos Políticos (CEMDP) and the Comissão de Anistia, two mechanisms operating since 1995 and 2002, respectively, to provide reparations to the victims and acknowledge the role of the state as a perpetrator during the military dictatorship. Between 2019 and 2022, the government reversed approved amnesty and compensation granting processes, with emphasis on military personnel who opposed the dictatorship. At the end of Bolsonaro's term, the CEMDP was dissolved. Instituto Vladimir Herzog, *Fortalecimento da Democracia: Monitoramento das Recomendações da Comissão Nacional da Verdade* (São Paulo: Instituto Vladimir Herzog, 2023), 23.

[89] The most direct link between Bolsonaro's commemorations of September 7, and the 150th anniversary of Independence in 1972 was the decision to bring D. Pedro I's heart from Portugal to tour Brazil in the 200th anniversary in 2022. In 1972, the military dictatorship "repatriated" D. Pedro's remains and took them on a tour through various cities. In 1976, D. Pedro I was buried at the Monument to the Independence of Brazil in São Paulo. See João Paulo Pimenta and Janaina Martins Cordeiro, "Projetos Políticos, Autoritarismo e Exclusão nas Comemorações da Independência do Brasil: Centenário (1922), Sesquicentenário (1972) e Bicentenário (2022)," *Cahiers des Amériques Latines* 102 (2023), http://journals.openedition.org/cal/17111.

author argues in favour of the "exemplary memory," a remembrance that draws lessons from past wrongs to confront present injustices, strengthen bonds of solidarity, and foster a more critical society. The memory is exemplary only when it emphasizes its universal dimension. Unfortunately, Todorov frames, not very rarely, difficult memories are exploited as a sources of power, privilege, and incitement to hatred. In this case, the "literal memory" abuses of the past portraying the victims and the human violations as unrepeatable and uniques. [90]

The process of the emergence of armed right' memories in the public sphere in Brazil reproduces the abusive logic defined by Todorov and reached its peak with the Bolsonaro administration. The President explored those memories in a literal manner, speaking about the challenges of 2019-2022, as if Brazil were still in the Cold War, and a military intervention, such as the 1964 coup d'état, was seen as the only solution to all the problems. On the institutionalized March 31st, the past and the present became muddled, while a cult of pro-dictatorship memories was established. According to Todorov, whereas the exemplary memory is liberating, "the literal memory, if taken to the extreme, carries risks."[91] One hypothesis is that the most overt statements in favour of the armed forces found support among uncivil voices and was the rhetoric that fueled the 2022 presidential election and the 2023 storming of Brasília when Bolsonaro lost (an equivalent to the US January 6th riots in 2021).

To continue the investigation regarding March 31st, this chapter also draws on *O Globo*, *Folha de São Paulo,* and *O Estado de São Paulo* as sources for analysis. As previously discussed in Chapter 1, the three main newspapers supported Bolsonaro's candidacy as a means to address the legacies of the PT administration. However, between 2019 and 2022, they became the target of widespread attacks and misinformation from Bolsonaro's supporters, who did not trust the mass

[90] Tzvetan Todorov, *Los abusos de la memoria.* (Barcelona: Paidós, 2000), 25-28.
[91] Ibdem, 31.

media as a source of reliable information.[92] Another source analyzed was the *Ordens do Dia* (Orders of the Day) issued by the Ministry of Defence over those four years. These documents are official speeches delivered at military headquarters on commemorative dates; because they were publicly released, they attracted public attention. Bolsonaro's obsession with March 31st generated extensive press coverage between 2019 and 2022.

Throughout the collected documentation, four main trends emerged about March 31st: official commemorations, Bolsonaro's statements in the media, pro-dictatorship civilian demonstrations, and disputes in court regarding the Orders of the Day. Although acknowledging that all these topics are important and demonstrate that the date became a target of broad discussion in society, this chapter will focus only on the first two to analyze the armed forces' and Bolsonaro's strategies and disputes regarding memory construction. The distinction between the two trends lies in how the institutional voice conveyed narratives about the date, combining the official state discourse, the views of Bolsonaro and the Armed Forces, and the criticisms from the opposition. At the same time, the president positioned himself both as a military figure in civilian clothing and as a populist politician through public events and interviews. Historian Carolina Bauer points out that Bolsonaro, like any member of the armed forces, is part of the "[military] memories community." Upon beginning his military career, Bolsonaro listened to the heroic narratives of his superiors about fighting subversives in 1964 and learned about the army's role in protecting the nation. He adopted these narratives and values, along with emotional bonds with his peers, that made him a military man. For this reason, he also used the military narratives to recover a national identity that could respond to Brazil's institutional, political, and socioeconomic crises.[93] My

[92] About Bolsonaro and the press in Brazil, see Girliani Martins da Silva, "Ataques à Imprensa no Twitter e a Relação com a Ascensão do Governo Bolsonaro" (MA Thesis, University of São Paulo, 2024).
[93] Caroline Silveira Bauer, "La dictadura cívico-militar brasileña en los discursos de Jair Bolsonaro: usos del pasado y negacionismo," *Relaciones Internacionales* 28, n. 57 (December 2019), 7.

research aligns with Bauer's analysis; however, it also identifies contrasts between the former captain and his community. After all, Bolsonaro was officially in the army for fifteen years but in politics for thirty years. He shares the historical perspective constructed by the armed forces but frames and disseminates his narrative differently.

2. Official Celebrations

The political scientists Eric Hershberg and Felipe Agüero note that there are divisions inside the armed forces, and militaries do not have a monolithic understanding of the past nor the future.[94] Indeed, Bolsonaro's government unveiled the differences and tensions regarding military memories, concerning not only the content of narratives but also how these memories should be remembered. The newspapers highlighted contrasts between the President and the military, including those who worked in his administration, and the armed forces as an institution itself, particularly in their use of these memories. These categories are sometimes confused, as the Bolsonaro administration employed both active-duty and military reservist personnel. For this reason, this section analyzes some examples of the "behind the scenes" and the Orders of the Day.

March 31st, 2019

In 2019, the presidential spokesperson announced that Bolsonaro ordered the Ministry of Defence to organize "proper celebrations" for March 31st through public events. After all, on that day in 1964, civilians and the military would have come together to put Brazil back on a course, which prevented the country from having "some kind of government that would not be good for

[94] Eric Hershberg and Felipe Agüero, "Introduction," in *Memorias Militares*, 33.

anyone nowadays."[95] Although the spokesperson did not specify how these "proper celebrations" would take place, this situation did not have precedents: the administrations of FHC, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and Dilma Rousseff created a politics of memory regarding the military dictatorship. Still, these former presidents preferred silence or low-key events on March 31st/April 1st to prevent confrontations with the army. In 2019, for the first time, a government was officially willing to commemorate the date, championing the narrative of the partnership between armed forces and society that saved Brazil in the past and the present.[96]

After the announcement, the press covered negotiations between the government and other groups that set limits to Bolsonaro's plans. First, newspapers reported a clash between the President and the high-ranking military: the armed forces welcomed official celebrations but without "confetti" or "carnival," and public demonstrations as Bolsonaro wanted, arguing that it could overshadow the discussions about pension reform.[97] Instead, the militaries suggested that the commemorations should follow the pattern of most years under the dictatorship: March 31st would be officially celebrated with military graduations, lectures on the topic, and an Order of the Day—a document read in barracks to honour critical historical events for the army and the nation. Although these ceremonies are held internally for a military audience, they receive media coverage and convey a message to society, making them events of a public-private nature. However, they were not the large festivities that Bolsonaro envisioned.

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[95] "Golpe de 64: Bolsonaro Determina Celebração da Data; Segundo Porta-voz da Presidência, Ministério da Defesa Organizará as 'Comemorações Devidas', Incluindo Uma Mensagem das Forças Armadas, para Marcar os 55 Anos da Tomada do Poder pelos Militares, no Domingo," *O Globo*, March 26, 2019.

[96] In the international level, the government also addressed critiques about the celebrations from the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Promotion of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of Non-Repetition Fabian Salvioli. In a telegram sent, the Federal Government denied a coup d'état in 1964 and argued that "a military government was necessary to remove the communist threat." "Governo Diz à ONU que Não Houve Golpe em 64," *Folha de São Paulo*, April 5, 2019.

[97] "Cúpula Militar Quer Evitar Celebração Excessiva nos 55 Anos do Golpe de 64," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 19, 2019; "Bolsonaro Determina 'Comemoração Devida' dos 55 anos do Golpe Militar," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 26, 2019.

This decision on how to celebrate March 31st also unveiled differences of opinion inside the armed forces. While some sectors acknowledged the justice of the opportunity to publicize the army's narrative, other groups demonstrated discomfort with the media attention. Major General Richard Nunes, the Army's head of social communications, argued that the situation was complicated because, once again, the armed forces were at the center of the debate. They had an essential role in Brazilian history "since its beginning," but dealing with March 31st was still very "poignant," and the polarization of the institution worried Nunes.[98] According to him, "there is a truth [to be shared], but we should move on." In this sense, for some older militaries, the memories of the armed forces during the transition to democracy and following decades were still painful, and should not be discussed. The episode brought to light differing views on how to approach the past: military officers such as General Nunes defended the authoritarian period but appeared to favour a politics of forgetting, returning to the terms established by the Amnesty Law. Under Bolsonaro's government, the armed forces could have a new opportunity to refashion their image, and the past should not be the focus.

In fact, as General Nunes noted, this past remains both painful and controversial. In this context, Bolsonaro's administration also had to navigate opposition from those critical of his government concerning the events surrounding the coup d'état. These groups, in the political sphere, civil society, and in the judiciary, protested against the celebrations in the media and, above all, in the courts. On this occasion, the *Ministério Público Federal* (Federal Public Ministry, MPF) issued recommendations to military headquarters to refrain from any commemoration, which in Portuguese carries a joyous connotation and is synonymous with celebration or homage to the dictatorship. As an attempt to mitigate the discussions, Bolsonaro ordered a change in

[98] "Ordem para Celebrar Golpe e Inédita em 20 Anos e Também Incomoda Militares," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 30, 2019.

terminology from “celebration” to remembrance,” “reviewing what was wrong, what was right, and using this for the good of Brazil in the future.” This statement, seemingly intended to present the memory as exemplary light, is confusing and unclear, a rhetorical artifice to deal with criticism. The army also followed up with a letter to military units, advising them to wait for legal advice regarding the MFP's document; however, they should proceed with the scheduled events. The newspapers reported readings of the Order of the Day and “silent commemorations.” One example was the ceremony “of remembrance of a historical fact” carried out by the Southeast Military Command of São Paulo that took place in a square named after a soldier who died in a guerrilla attack in 1968. Another example was the 30-minute event in the courtyard of the Military Command at the Planalto Palace, where military personnel remembered the coup as a “civic-military moment.” Overall, the events illustrate how the armed and Bolsonaro’s government tried to navigate this contested memory in democracy (with legal constraints and civil opposition) while attempting to shape the narrative in their favour.

Bolsonaro and the barracks

From 2019 to 2022, the Bolsonaro administration used the date as a moment of affirmation, releasing Orders of the Day that increasingly highlighted the saviour role of the armed forces in Brazil in the past, present, and future. This generated conflict between the President and the high ranks in the barracks, who accused Bolsonaro of intending to politicize military personnel in his favour. In fact, he wanted the endorsement of the armed forces, especially from those who held government positions during his term, both reservists and those on active duty.

This situation, considered by journalists to be the most significant military crisis since the end of the dictatorship, peaked on March 29, 2021. On this date, Bolsonaro fired General Fernando

Azevedo e Silva from the Ministry of Defence in a protocol meeting for the General present the Order of the Day for publication. Bolsonaro stated that he wanted a "contentious document," openly attacking the pro-human rights memory, which the General refused to provide. In a later statement about his departure, Azevedo e Silva said that he did not ask for his resignation, and in his functions, he "preserved the Armed Forces as a state, not a government institution."[99] The three armed forces commanders put their posts at the president's disposal as a protest, which was accepted, demonstrating that there was dissent within the military and that Bolsonaro did not represent a homogenous view.

For the Ministry of Defence, Bolsonaro appointed General Walter Souza Braga Netto, who had been Minister of State Head of the Civilian House of the Presidency of the Republic since 2019 and someone aligned with his project.[100] This appointment upset the army: Braga Netto was not the longest-serving four-star general, violating the hierarchical norms of the military institution. For the Army Command, Bolsonaro also considered selecting a general with less career and promotion time than other generals on the waiting list, but discarded that option to avoid further irritating the military. In his first act as head of office, Braga Netto rewrote Azevedo e Silva's Order of the Day, including "the need to celebrate the date as a milestone in history," which was not foreseen in the first version. He also removed an excerpt referring to the role of the armed forces as a state institution.[101] In a brief press conference on March 31st to introduce the new three

[99] "Azevedo e Silva Deixa Ministério da Defesa em Mais uma Baixa no Governo Bolsonaro," *El País*, March 29, 2021.

[100] In a ceremony to greet promoted generals in 2022, Bolsonaro stated that among its 23 ministers, the Defence one was who standed out because he had the troops in his hands, which, ultimately, "could make the country move towards normality, progress and peace." He guaranteed that, if the country called on the military again, the armed forces would do "everything", "even at the sacrifice of their own lives". "Em Evento com Militares, Bolsonaro Diz que Tropas Podem Fazer País 'Rumar para Normalidade'; Presidente Afirmou Que Ministro da Defesa É o Que 'Mais Se Destaca' Por Ter 'A Tropa em Suas Mãos,'" *O Globo*, April 5, 2022.

[101] "Braga Netto Alterou Ordem do Dia Sobre Golpe de 1964 e Excluiu Menção de Forças como Instituição de Estado," *Folha de São Paulo*, April 1, 2021.

commanders, Braga Netto said that on that historical date, he should reinforce that "Brazil's greatest heritage was the guarantee of democracy and the freedom of its people." He stated that combating COVID-19 was the country's primary challenge, and that the armed forces had played a crucial role in addressing it. He added that, *"Os militares não faltaram no passado e não faltarão sempre que o país precisar"* (the military did not neglect Brazil in the past and will not neglect the country whenever it needs) and "the forces are faithful to their constitutional missions, to defend the homeland, guarantee constitutional powers and democratic freedoms."[102] When reading the Order of the Day, he also called Bolsonaro the "Supreme Commander of the armed forces."[103] The three new commanders were present at the announcement, but neither they nor the minister were willing to answer questions from the press. The changing in the Ministry of Defence and the Order of the Day in 2021 underscored how the armed right memories became a tool of political management.

In the middle of this crisis, the Military Command at the Planalto Palace emailed coordinators of subordinate brigades, regiments and battalions about the legal prohibition of political demonstrations by military personnel on duty or reservists, including on social media, whether criticizing or supporting an act by a hierarchical superior.[104] Articles published in *O Estado de São Paulo* and *Folha de São Paulo* widened the conflicts inside the army: there were those against the broke of hierarchy coming from the President, those against the tone of Braga Netto's Order of the Day and the celebration of a controversial date, but also the acknowledgment of the existence of military members who shared the same ideas of Bolsonaro, and would support

[102] "Democracia e Liberdade São Maior Patrimônio, Diz Braga Netto ao Anunciar Novos Chefes das Forças Armadas," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 31, 2021.
[103] "Braga Netto Tenta Se Aproximar do STF," *O Estado de São Paulo*, April 2, 2021.
[104] "Comando Militar do Planalto Alerta Subordinados Sobre Proibição de Manifestação Política," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 31, 2021.

his project.[105] Among young officers and those further down the chain of command, there was enthusiasm for the anti-democratic agenda associated with Bolsonaro. The apparent unity of the Armed Forces eluded the control of the military's high ranks, and it was publicly viewed as an institution amidst discourses on hierarchy, tradition, and political polarization in the country. Many members felt drawn to a discourse that empowered the historical role of military personnel in the nation and sought to take its values into society.

Orders of the Day (2019-2022)

Signed by the Minister of Defence and the three armed forces, the Orders of the Day given annually each March 31st were a chance to speak more openly about the "Movement of 1964."[106] For some military members, FHC, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and Dilma Rousseff's governments generated a historical distortion about 1964, and these documents served to dispute the past and present the "truth." In this way, the terminology used demonstrated that the armed forces were familiar with the historiographical debate and vocabulary: there was a constant claim to place 1964 "in context," analyze the "sources" with impartiality to understand what was happening in Brazil and the world between 1964 and 1985, and learn from history. Vice-President General Hamilton Mourão also reminded that "[1964] is a historical fact, which belongs to the history of Brazil and will remain there. It cannot be erased with an eraser."[107] He also created the hashtag on Twitter

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[105] "Comandantes Agiram para Acalmar Quartéis," *O Estado de São Paulo*, April 2, 2021, and "Bolsonaro Desrespeitou Militares e Só Vai Conseguir Se Distanciar Mais Deles, Diz General da Reserva," *Folha de São Paulo*, April 2, 2021.

[106] Ministry of Defence,"Ordem do Dia Alusiva ao 31 de Março de 1964," *Ministério da Defesa* (March 31 2019)./noticias/54245ordemdodiaalusivaao31demarcode1964; Ministry of Defence, "Ordem do Dia Alusiva ao 31 de Março de 1964," *Ministério da Defesa* (March 31 2020). https://defesa.gov.br/noticias/67417-ordem-do-dia-alusiva-ao-31-de-marco; Ministry of Defence, "Ordem do Dia Alusiva ao 31 de Março de 1964," *Ministério da Defes*a (March 31 2021). https://www.gov.br/defesa/pt-br/centrais-de-conteudo/noticias/ordem-do-dia-alusiva-ao-31-de-marco-de-1964-2021; and Ministry of Defence,"Ordem do Dia Alusiva ao 31 de Março de 1964," *Ministério da Defesa* (March 31 2022). https://www.gov.br/defesa/pt-br/centrais-de-conteudo/noticias/ordem-do-dia-alusiva-ao-dia-31-de-marco-1.The Orders of the Day were removed from the Ministry of Defence website.

[107] "Em Entrevista à Folha, Mourão Aponta Falta de Coordenação em Ações Finais Contra Coronavirus," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 29, 2020.

#31demarçopertenceàHistória (March 31st belongs to History), opposing to #DitadutaNuncaMais (Dictatorship Never Again) posted by entities such as the National History Association and the Vladimir Herzog Institute. The Orders of the Day adopted a paradoxical approach to history: they defended the historical importance of the fact, which justified the remembrance. However, when claiming that 1964 "belonged to history," they also called to leave the fact in the past or in the symbolic dimension. After all, "history cannot be rewritten, in a mere act of revisionism, without due contextualization."[108]

The switching of Ministers of Defence of Fernando de Azevedo e Silva to Walter Braga Netto discussed previously impacted the focus on one or more aspects discussed, and resulted in a more celebratory and incisive tone. However, the qualitative analysis using the software Taguette identified that there were historical narrative threads and a structure presented broadly in all four documents: historical chronology; a teleological view that legitimized the coup and considered it inevitable; the constitutionality of the military regime and its meaning to the building of the contemporary democracy; and the affirmation of the importance of the armed forces for the nation.

The Orders of the Day statements usually began by praising the date and considering it a starting point for the democratic regime that Brazil has today. Therefore, it argued that the need to understand 1964 lies in a broader historical context. In the Orders of the Day, Brazilian history started upon the arrival of the Portuguese in the 16th century. Overall, Brazil was a peaceful country until the 20th century; the Colonial and Imperial periods and the beginning of the Republic in 1889 did not experience significant conflicts, which ensured a "civilizing evolution."[109] This vision does not mention the genocide against Indigenous Peoples and enslaved Africans, nor the

[108] Ministry of Defence, "Ordem do Dia," (March 31, 2022).
[109] Ministry of Defence, "Ordem do Dia" (March 31 2019).

revolts and wars between the 17th and 19th centuries.[110] This peace was disturbed by phenomena that impacted Europe, such as industrialization, urbanization, and modernization, that resulted in "imbalances of power," the rise of the "totalitarian ideologies" of Communism and Nazi-Fascism — understood as two sides of the same coin, a contemporary historical revisionism — and the First and Second World Wars.

Facing turmoil, the documents argued that Brazil defended democracy with its "citizens in uniform," mentioning the dismantling of the *Intentona Comunista*[111] in 1935 and "the significant participation and sacrifice of lives of Brazilian sailors, soldiers and airmen on the battlefields of the Atlantic and in Europe" in the Second World War.[112] However, the threat persisted during the Cold War, and while humanity was dealing with post-war traumas, Brazil needed to take action against a "serious political, social, and economic instability"[113] and conflicts of a "revolutionary nature" led by the Communist Bloc.[114] With a comprehensive tone, the military authors spoke about the existence of militant oppositionists during the 1960s, justifying that "utopian ingredients packaged dreams with promises of easy equality and magical freedoms" and acknowledged that those "lures attracted even the well-intentioned."[115] Anyhow, the pressure from these armed groups fighting for power demanded that "institutions" under the military regime act to sustain "democracy" and implied the use of any means for this goal, including violating human rights.

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[110] Some of these conflicts will be briefly discussed in the next chapter, such as the War of Canudos.

[111] Press and government called *Intentona Comunista* (Intentona means "crazy intent, foolish plan") the attempt to overthrow Getulio Vargas's government, and install a Communist government. Led by military members from the coalition *Aliança Nacional Libertadora*, originating mainly from the Brazilian Communist Party, the movement was repressed, and resulted in a generalized persecution of opponents. FGV-CPDOC, "Revolta Comunista de 1935 - Atlas Histórico do Brasil." https://atlas.fgv.br/verbete/6361 (Accessed 1 March 2025).

[112] Ministry of Defence, "Ordem do Dia" (March 31 2022).

[113] Ministry of Defence, "Ordem do Dia" (March 31 2021).

[114] Ministry of Defence, "Ordem do Dia" (March 31 2019).

[115] Ministry of Defence, "Ordem do Dia" (March 31 2020).

At this point, two central ideas are key to this argument: inevitability and legitimacy. Actions should be taken to prevent such dangers, aligned with the armed forces' commitment to freedom and democracy "for which they have fought throughout history."[116] The "1964 Movement" would be a milestone for Brazilian democracy because "it prevented much more."[117] March 31st would also reflect the collective aspirations of the time. The armed forces argued that they received broad support from "families [who] were alarmed and took action," but also churches, businesspeople, political leaders, the press, the *Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil* (Order of Attorneys of Brazil, OAB), and the streets.[118] Armed forces responded to the clamour of the majority of the population, took responsibility for containing that insatiable escalation with all the foreseeable consequences,[119] and "pacified the country."[120] On another note, from a legal perspective, the National Congress also blessed this action, declaring the presidency vacant and accepting the indirect election of General Castello Branco. In this way, while the armed forces aimed to demonstrate popular and institutional support, they also sought to share the responsibility—and perhaps some accountability—for the events of 1964. However, in reality, the Congress session on April 2, chaired by Auro de Moura Andrade, had no legal backing. There were vehement protests from some deputies, such as Tancredo Neves, who recalled that João Goulart was still in Brazil, which made the declaration of vacancy illegal. As the historian Ana Carolina Zimmermann also pointed out, the concepts of "people" and "popular demand" in

[116] Ministry of Defence, "Ordem do Dia" (March 31 2019).
[117] Ministry of Defence, "Ordem do Dia" (March 31 2020).
[118] Ministry of Defence, "Ordem do Dia" (March 31 2020).
[119] Ministry of Defence,"Ordem do Dia (March 31 2022).
[120] Ministry of Defence,"Ordem do Dia (March 31 2021).

military narratives about the military dictatorship represent specific layers of society: upper and middle class, white, heteronormative, aligned with conservative right-wing values.[121]

According to the Orders of the Day, the military regime successfully stabilized the country. Unlike the common nostalgic imagination about the period, the Orders of the Day focused not on the economy but on the political gains that enabled the reestablishment of peace and the strengthening of democracy. This draws attention to the fact that the documents considered the Amnesty Law of 1979, the consolidation of this process. Ignoring the campaigns organized by civil society to win this right and the political crisis that occurred at the end of the 1970s, the narrative portrayed the military government as the protagonist in granting a "broad, general, and unrestricted" amnesty. Still, the Order of the Day of 2020 reminded that this "political and social agreement determined the paths that are still followed."[122] Although the Amnesty Law is viewed as a pact between the Armed Forces and society, the latter had little say in its final version. Also, reminding that this legislation remains in force was a direct message to critics who claim a reinterpretation of the law. In the armed forces' words, everyone who argues that the Amnesty Law granted pardon in exchange for the non-accountability of the crimes committed by perpetrators is committing an act of "revisionism without context."

Different passages honoured "civilians and military personnel who have left us a legacy of peace, freedom, and democracy,"[123] and also stressed how the "lessons learned from those difficult times (...) transformed into teachings for new generations"[124] that enriched contemporary democracy. Using similar language to that of activists, the armed forces drew on its authoritarian

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[121] Ana Carolina Zimmermann, "O Revisionismo Histórico nas Comemorações do Golpe Civil-Militar de 1964 Durante o Governo Bolsonaro (2019-2022): Heranças Autoritárias e Encerramento do Passado," *História da Historiografia: International Journey of Theory and History of Historiography* 41 v.16 (2023): 1-25.
[122] Ministry of Defence,"Ordem do Dia (March 31 2020).
[123] Ministry of Defence,"Ordem do Dia (March 31 2022).
[124] Ministry of Defence,"Ordem do Dia (March 31 2019).

past to legitimize its actions in 1964, hoping that by the 2020s, Brazil would not repeat the same mistakes that had led to those actions. In this way, they argued that the armed forces still would have an essential role in the present: they have "followed the changes [of the new democratic rule]," continuing to fulfill their constitutional mission of maintaining peace and stability.[125]

The Order of the Day of 2021 presented an element in the narrative that became a target of controversy since Bolsonaro's government: the argument that the armed forces should also guarantee the constitutional powers, "understanding that "harmony and balance between them" were the way to achieve order.[126] This premise is based on Article 142 of the Federal Constitution that states that the armed forces "are intended for the defence of the Motherrland, to guarantee constitutional powers and, at the initiative of any of these, law and order." Part of the armed forces has instrumented this article to argue that they have a "moderating role" in the Brazilian state, which would legitimize their intent to intervene in the 2022 elections. In this sense, part of civil society also used this argument to defend military intervention and "reestablish order" after Lula's victory. According to the jurists Lorena Martoni and Emilio Peluso Neder Meyer, Article 142 is a legacy of the military prerogatives from the dictatorship. Since the 1930s, the military barracks in Brazil have had a strong disbelief in the capacity of civilians to govern the country. Officially prohibited from running for public office, the armed forces propagated a doctrine that attributed moderating power to the forces, which was at the root of their defence of the military regime. During the constituent assembly, the then Minister of the Army, General Leônidas Pires Gonçalves sought to include the role of moderator in the new constitution, but it was not accepted. However,

[125] Ministry of Defence,"Ordem do Dia (March 31 2020).
[126] Ministry of Defence,"Ordem do Dia (March 31 2021).

Article 142 is a result of this claim.[127] In 2020, the Chamber of Deputies published a report clarifying that no democratic country allows the armed forces to mediate constitutional conflicts."[128]

The Orders of the Day presented the traditional armed forces' historical narrative about 1964, refashioned in line with human rights activists. They celebrated the return to democracy, not opposing it, but arguing that the military dictatorship was part of the path that led to the democratic regime Brazil experiences today. The "positive language" sought to resemble post-conflict historiographic texts, employing terms from the humanities field, particularly those related to human rights. On another note, the documents also added new elements to the classic narrative, such as the more recent revisionism that equates Nazi-Fascism and Communism. Overall, the documents demonstrated an effort to distort the idea of democracy, using this narrative to legitimize a past that could justify current political actions.

3. Bolsonaro's Statements

Between March 30 and April 3, 2019, the newspaper *O Globo* reported Bolsonaro's official trip to Israel. After visiting the World Holocaust Remembrance Center Yad Vashem, where he argued that Nazism was a left-wing movement, the newspaper also mentioned an "unexpected gesture for a president:" a meeting with admirers. On this occasion, he recalled his speech honouring Colonel Ustra during the vote on Rousseff's impeachment in 2016. He concluded, "The truth had to be known. An owner of a research institute said that after my vote, not because of the

[127] Lorena Martoni de Freitas and Emilio Peluso Neder Meyer, "Forças Armadas e a Constituição de 1988: Bases Normativas para um Projeto de Desmilitarização da Política," *Revista Brasileira de Estudos Políticos* n.. 129 (July/ December 2024): 533.

[128] Câmara dos Deputados, "Câmara Emite Parecer Esclarecendo Que Artigo 142 da Constituição Não Autoriza Intervenção Militar, https://www.camara.leg.br/noticias/667144-camara-emite-parecer-esclarecendo-que-artigo-142-da-constituicao-nao-autoriza-intervencao-militar/ (Accessed 20 March 2025).

vote itself, but because of what I said, I would no longer even be elected a councillor of the capital of my state, Rio de Janeiro. And exactly the opposite happened." [129]

This episode in his first year in office exemplifies trends that persisted during his tenure: the promotion of historical revisionism and negationism, populist attitudes towards his supporters, and the notion that he was a bearer of "the truth." Indeed, in 2016, people could have argued that Bolsonaro's statement was the end of his public career. However, as chapter one and this chapter have pointed out, his voice found an echo among Brazilians who shared the same opinion. Furthermore, his discourse and behavioural strategies might have convinced more people about the benefits of the military dictatorship.

The Italian semiotician and theorist of communication, Paolo Demuru's concept of the "politics of allurement," is useful for understanding Bolsonaro's statements. After analyzing discourses from far-right figures, such as Bolsonaro, Donald Trump, Viktor Orbán, and Matteo Massini, the author identified elements of conspiracy theories, implying that the reality experienced daily hides powerful plans of domination, whether by Communists or secret sects. These leaders present themselves as "knowers of the truth" and use concrete facts to construct fantastical narratives, which is the core point of understanding why these men receive widespread support. According to Demuru, the experience of discovering "a secret" or "the truth" and seeing the world from a different perspective allures people amidst harsh and violent socioeconomic conditions. The excitement of knowing the truth is an antidote to survival.[130] In the big picture, the historical narratives about the military dictatorship were just one of Bolsonaro's rhetorical strategies for his political project; upon closer examination, they proved to be an essential

[129] "Bolsonaro e Araújo Repetem que Nazismo Foi de Esquerda," *O Globo*, April 3, 2019.
[130] Paolo Demuru, "Políticas Do Encanto: Extrema Direita e Fantasias Da Conspiração," - FESPSP. YouTube video, 1:35. April 15, 2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87K-2ntXj44&t=4026s.

argument. The long-standing anti-communist sentiment in Brazil, nostalgia for the military dictatorship, and a violent reality, increasingly militarized with private security and the emergence of militias, may have made these narratives alluring. Following the logic of conspiracy, if Bolsonaro knee the truth and was a reliable leader, then the 1964 coup d'état would have been beneficial to Brazil, and a military intervention in the 2020s might have been a possible solution to contemporary grievances.

Before his trip to Israel and on the eve of March 31st, Bolsonaro gave a 35-minute interview for one of Brazil's most-watched tough-on-crime TV shows and spent 7 minutes defending the military dictatorship. According to him:

> We have to know the truth. It does not mean it was an incredible regime at all. Which marriage is wonderful? Now and then, there is a little problem; it is rare for a couple not to have a problem, right? Now, among our minor issues and those of other countries, look at how far Venezuela has come?! If these people who in the past tried to get to power using weapons [referring to left-wing groups] and nowadays most [of them] are in prison or being prosecuted for corruption (...), how would Brazil be?[131]

To broaden his audience and appeal to poorer constituents, Bolsonaro chose to compare the military dictatorship to a marriage, which in a culturally Christian society would attribute specific values to the regime, such as sacred, heteronormative, and consensual. The latter again evokes the idea that the coup d'état was legal and wanted. The former military captain relativized persecution, forced disappearances, murder, censorship, compulsory retirement, among other human rights violations, comparing them to disagreements in a love relationship, and calling them "little problems." There is also a narrative that marriages are naturally unhappy, and, as in the

[131] "Bolsonaro Nega Ditadura Militar e Diz que Regime Viveu Probleminhas," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 28, 2019 and "Bolsonaro Adota Meias Verdades e Omissões ao Falar Sobre Ditadura," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 29, 2019.

dictatorship, there were no possible alternatives to that reality. Though legal in Brazil, Bolsonaro's metaphor of marriage does not include a "divorce."

Following Demuru's concept, in this passage Bolsonaro formulated "the truth" by mixing "real evidence" and conspiracy. While he "acknowledged" that the regime was not ideal, he conflated two periods by mentioning the imprisonment of some former guerrilleros from the era of the military dictatorship who had been accused of corruption by the Lava Jato Operation-scandal of 2014-2021. However, he did that to disqualify the opposition to the dictatorship, and anachronistically justify the regime by the alleged crime they committed five decades later. At the same time, when relating the fight against the dictatorship to PT, he transferred these values to the current polarization between the left and right wings in Brazil.

These arguments were also used to nurture a current conspiracy theory: an existing project to transform Brazil into a new "Venezuela." While Cuba was the ghost that hovered over the conservatives during the Cold War, it is the country on the northern border that is the biggest fanciful fear nowadays. Researchers in communication, Viktor Chagas, Michelle Modesto, and Dandara Magalhães, pointed out that Brazilian groups with liberal tendencies in the economy but conservative in customs have tried to equate the PT administration with the governments of Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro since the 2002 presidential election. At first, the idea that "Brazil would become Venezuela" carried uncertainty because it was unclear how Lula's first government would look and whether he would align himself with the "Bolivarian" discourse from Caracas. Over time, especially after the political and humanitarian crisis experienced in Venezuela, mentioning that country became synonymous with the left-wing incapacity to govern. In analyzing memes on far-right WhatsApp groups in 2018, the authors identified a rhetoric that associated

Venezuela with the communist danger, atheist values, and foreign interference. In summary, something that Brazilians should fight against.[132]

The defence of the military dictatorship became more forceful throughout the Bolsonaro government. On March 15, 2020 (purposely scheduled to remember the protests for Dilma's impeachment on March 15, 2015) Bolsonarists organized protests in various cities in Brazil to support the President, who was against the lockdown decreed by state governors. They also blamed the legislative and judicial branches for supporting this measure, which they considered "dictatorial." In Brasilia, Bolsonaro met protesters who had banners calling for the closure of the National Congress and the Supreme Court, and took pictures with them.[133] Afterwards, he went up the Planalto Palace ramp while these group of supporters were singing out demanding the return of the AI-5, an Institutional Act of 1968 that greatly empowered the President at the expense of citizens'political rights and the judiciary.[134] This demand would become increasingly common among his supporters. A few days later, he re-tweeted a call for a new protest, this time "in front of the barracks," on March 31, which caused discussions on senior military officers' WhatsApp groups, who understood this act as a "cheap provocation" because they disagreed with Bolsonaro instrumentalizing the armed forces for his own project.[135]

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[132] Viktor Chagas, Michelle Modesto and Dandara Magalhães, "O Brasil Vai virar Venezuela: Medo, Memes e Enquadramentos Emocionais no WhatsApp Pró-Bolsonaro," *Esferas* 14 (2019): 4-6.

[133] "Veja Crimes de Responsabilidade que Bolsonaro Pode Ter Cometido Desde o Início Do Mandato," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 22, 2020.

[134] The Institutional Act Number Five (AI-5) removed the remaining constitutional rights left after 1964 and it is called by scholars as "the coup within the coup d'état." The act enabled the President to have the right to close the National Congress, revoke mandates, suspend citizens'political rights as well the right to habeas corpus, and curtail the judiciary in acts covered by AI-5. See more: Memórias Reveladas, "AI-5: Nunca Mais," https://www.gov.br/memoriasreveladas/pt-br/centrais-de-conteudo/destaques/ai-5-nunca-mais (Accessed 4 April, 2025).

[135] "Sugestão de Ato na Porta de Quartéis Exposta em Rede Social de Bolsonaro Alarma Militares," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 17, 2020.

However, this pro-military rhetorical tactic of evoking the dictatorship and presenting the armed forces as saviours for Brazilian contemporary problems continued, and during his government, Bolsonaro also started to mobilize around April 19, Army Day. One example happened a couple of days later, following the episode just described in 2020. The President encouraged motorcades and protests nationwide on that date, calling for a return to normalcy and the reopening of commerce in Brazil. At that moment, Brazil had 2347 deaths; by the end of his government, 690,000 Brazilians had succumbed to Covid-19 (according to the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission about the pandemic, 75% of them could have been avoided if the Federal Government had not been negligent).[136] In the protests, participants were seen carrying banners calling for "vertical isolation", "Out, Rodrigo Maia" (the then Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies), "AI-5 Now!", "TV Globo Garbage" (a media station critical of Bolsonaro) and asking for military intervention. *Folha de São Paulo* even reported a banner that asked for the "right to blow off the head of a PT member if they invade your property."[137] Bolsonaro himself participated in a pro-military intervention protest outside the Army Headquarters in Brasília with a few hundred attendees. On the back of a pickup truck, Bolsonaro delivered a populist-military speech, addressing his audience as if they were a troop. He stated that "now people are in power and we do not want to negotiate anything," "more than your right, you have the obligation to fight for your country." He finished arguing that "everyone in Brazil has to understand that they are subject to the will of the Brazilian people."[138] The next day, he denied the press articles that described his

[136] Agência Senado,"Pesquisas Apontam Que 400 Mil Mortes Poderiam Ser Evitadas; Governistas Questionam," https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2021/06/24/pesquisas-apontam-que-400-mil-mortes-poderiam-ser-evitadas-governistas-questionam#:~:text=Pesquisas%20apontam%20que%20400%20mil%20mortes%20poderiam%20ser%20evitadas%3B%20governistas%20questionam,-Compartilhe%20este%20conte%C3%BAdo (Accessed 18 April 2024).

[137] "Carreatas pelo País Têm Bolsonaro, Pedidos de Reabertura do Comércio e Avenida Paulista Fechada," *Folha de São Paulo*, April 19, 2020.

[138] "Não Queremos Negociar Nada, Diz Bolsonaro em Ato Pró-Intervenção Militar Diante do QG do Exército," *Folha de São Paulo*, April 19, 2020.

discourse as authoritarian, saying he had been misinterpreted, and claimed to be pro-democracy. Despite the usual strategy of dismissing controversial statements, it was clear that the speech in favour of a coup d'état was no longer taboo.

After four years in office, Bolsonaro strengthened this connection between the discourse on the military dictatorship and his project to remain in power. In 2022, he presented a more obstinate and confrontational posture because his proposal to replace the voting machines with printed ballots had not been accepted, and the polls indicated that Lula would likely be elected in the October presidential elections. On March 30, Bolsonaro said that the votes in the next elections would be counted manually, without explaining how this would be possible. He criticized the *Superior Tribunal Eleitoral* (Superior Electoral Court, TSE). He argued that "We (not explaining exactly who they would be, but implying the armed forces and his supporters) defend democracy, freedom, even sacrificing our lives." He added that the situation was not "left-wing versus right-wing, but good versus evil," and the population was increasingly understanding which side each candidate was on. He finished saying that "we, the military, back then swore to give our lives for the country, and all of us will now give our lives for our freedom."[139]

On the following day, the last March 31st of his mandate, he joined a ceremony at the Planalto Palace. He started asking: "What happened that day? Nothing. History does not record any president of the Republic having lost his mandate on that day. So why the lie? Who does it serve?" To support his argument that there was no coup d'état, he stated that the National Congress voted for the vacancy of the presidency in 1964, including the vote from Ulysses Guimarães, the deputy who later served as President of the 1988 Constituent Assembly and is known as "the father of the new Constitution." As explained at the beginning of Chapter 1, most scholars argued that

[139] "Bolsonaro Ameaça Judiciário Sobre Eleições e Diz Que o Bem Vencerá," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 30, 2022.

the coup d'état did not begin on April 2, but rather days earlier, when military troops started moving from Juiz de Fora towards Rio de Janeiro to overthrow the president and received support from the military high command. In the case of Guimarães, he indeed supported the coup, but later he became one of the political figures who opposed the military regime.[140]

Bolsonaro persisted in his argument, stating that whoever took over the government was not the military, but the federal deputy and president of the Chamber, Ranieri Mazzilli, implying here that there had been democracy. "Why omit this?" He continued to mention that on April 11th, the National Congress, in light of the 1946 Constitution, conducted an indirect election with almost 100% of the deputies present — including Guimarães — and chose Marshal Castelo Branco as the President of the Republic. "He only took office on April 15, 1964. And the story continued." Mazzilli, indeed, assumed the office, but only as a decorative president, because the military junta, known as the Supreme Command of the Revolution, was actually in charge of the country. Composed by the future President Army General Arthur da Costa e Silva, Air Force Lieutenant-Brigadier Francisco de Assis Correia de Mello, and Navy Vice-Admiral Augusto Hamann Rademaker Grunewald, the junta signed the Institutional Act 1 (AI-1). This document officially dismissed Goulart's government and called for an election to be held on April 11th. There was only one candidate, Castelo Branco, who was elected with 361 votes in favour and 72 abstentions. The AI-1 granted the president full powers and enabled the revocation of political mandates and the removal of public servants. Before the indirect election, 40 federal deputies were impeached.[141]

"What would Brazil be without the work of the military government? It would be nothing." He highlighted the military presidents, examples of economic modernization, and the "fantastic

[140]Memórias da Ditadura. "Ulysses Guimarães," Memorias da Ditadura," https://memoriasdaditadura.org.br/personagens/ulysses-guimaraes/ (Accessed 18 April 2025).
[141] Marcos Napolitano, 1964: Regime Militar Brasileiro (São Paulo: Contexto, 2014), 72-73.

Brazilians" at the forefront of these projects. He mentioned the Manaus Free Trade Zone: What would the Amazon be like without Castelo Branco's creation of it? We would have already lost the Amazon." He did not mention the deforestation and mining issues that have impacted the Amazon's existence. Again, he evoked Manichaean good versus evil for talking about the military dictatorship: "It is a fight of truth against lies, of history against story, of good against evil. And Brazil resisted."[142]

In his speech, he continued to attack the Supreme Federal Court (STF) again, calling its ministers "enemies who inhabit the region of the Três Poderes [square]." He argued that Brazil had everything to be a great nation, and it should not let "a few get in our way." Then, he directly addressed a message to the ministers: "If you do not have ideas, shut up. Put on your toga and stay there. Do not bother other people." He went further in his threat and recalled the liberation of gun licenses that took place under his government: "armed people will never be defeated (...) on the occasion of the 2022 elections, the votes will be counted in Brazil. It will not be two or three [STE ministers] who decide how these votes will be counted."[143]

Both the armed forces as an institution and Bolsonaro present countermemories of the military dictatorship, promoting revisionist narratives that do not necessarily deny the brutality of the regime, but legitimize the coup d'état and the role of the armed forces in the nation; the difference between them is the level of negationism. The historian Mateus Henrique de Faria Pereira defines this concept as the radicalization of denial or revisionism, which involves falsifying

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[142] "No Aniversário do Golpe Militar, Bolsonaro Volta a Atacar Ministros do STF: 'Cala A Boca'; 'Que Alguns Poucos Não nos Atrapalhem. Se Não Tem Ideias, Cala a Boca. Bota a Sua Toga e Fica Aí, Sem Encher o Saco dos Outros', Disse o Presidente em Evento no Planalto," *O Globo*, March 31, 2022.

[143] "Bolsonaro Defende Ditadura e Diz Para Ministros do STF Calarem a Boca," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 31, 2022.

a fact.[144] In his statements, Bolsonaro used these narratives as a platform for his political project, communicating in a straightforward and concise way.

If the far right is a phenomenon that must be understood at the intersection of the global and the local, the Brazilian version has militarism as one of its foundations. Bolsonaro knew how to exploit this moral logic and tough-on-crime policies rethoric.

4. Conclusion

Since the 2013 protests, uncivil movements have increased their presence in public spaces to express grievances about corruption, the economy, violence, and other problems affecting Brazilian society. In this context, these groups have claimed the armed right's memories in different ways as a reference to address contemporary issues, and Jair Bolsonaro's administration represented a turning point in the Brazilian memory market. Bilbija and Payne observe that when patrons traumatized by the past purchase goods, what they acquire may not be memory itself, but rather the action that memory inspires. The prospect of acknowledgment can offer a sense of comfort to those still marked by past trauma.[145] In this case, as an influencer, he offered the recognition and promises of action that uncivil movements needed, becoming the political representation of these groups, institutionalizing the armed right' memories and promises between 2019 and 2022. The armed forces, the primary memory-makers, supported Bolsonaro's candidacy and accepted to participated in his administration, occupying different public roles.

In terms of content, particularly in the analysis of the Orders of the Day, the military and Bolsonaro agreed in mainly presenting the armed memories in a literal manner: the narrative is

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[144] Mateus Henrique de Faria Pereira, *Lembrança do Presente: Ensaios Sobre a Condição Histórica na Era da Internet* (Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2022), 39-40.
[145] Ksenija Bilbija and Leigh A.Payne, *Accounting for Violence*, 5.

repetitive and unquestioning, and it does not admit the wrongdoings of the past. In 1964, the armed forces were the winner, and most had not completed their grief process in acknowledging their loss and the impact suffered after 1985. The voices analyzed carried a tone of resentment and sounded stuck in the past. This "eternal reenactment" in the speeches that reiterate the saviour role of the military in saving Brazil from Communism also comes along with the question: speak publicly about 1964 or remain silent?

In this sense, the analysis demonstrated that, although Bolsonaro and the armed forces share a similar historical narrative regarding the military dictatorship, they cannot be treated as a single actor. Within the memory market, memory-makers, promoters, and customers can compete because they do not share the same goals. Bolsonaro's administration shed light on different opinions inside the armed forces as an institution, with members who did not want to discuss the authoritarian past and disliked how he abused of March 31st, and others who approved and supported his celebratory project. The military also demonstrated an attachment to the Amnesty Law that Bolsonaro never had.

Regarding the claims that the 1964 coup d'état could serve as a reference for contemporary's problems, these discourses contradict Todorov's definition of exemplary memories. These uncivil actors manipulate the past to preach "justice" by violence, not legal tools. Bolsonaro, who had always been an enthusiast of the military regime, knew how to exploit this sentiment of revenge to seize power. Following the myth-making process typical of the right-wing culture, he transformed March 31st into propaganda, and his abuse of this memory makes it hard sometimes to distinguish the past from the present.[146] Bolsonaro's abuses of the armed right

[146] Paolo Demuru, *Políticas Do Encanto: Extrema Direita E Fantasias Da Conspiração* (São Paulo: Editora Elefante, 2024), 33.

memory was observed even by members of the armed forces who publicly tried to create a distance between the institution and the President.

The constant revisionism and denial of the accounts about the human rights violations during the military regime were aligned with one of his slogans, John's Gospel (8:32), "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." The narratives pro-1964 served as fuel for Bolsonaro's conspiratorial theories of "us vs them": his supporters/ the nation, who were "fighting" against the PT administration's legacies and a progressive agenda, could be identified with the "good" or "rights" citizens/nation who were discontent with João Goulart's government and were afraid of the Communists (and the progressive reforms promised by Jango). Even though Bolsonaro was the President, he still presented himself as a victim and argued that the nation was in danger. In this context, the armed forces, who are the guards of the country and have intervened in the past in favour of the nation, would do the same in the present. Demuru observes that for conspiracists, the past can be as open as the future, and narratives can change according to the political game, "with what was said yesterday being contradicted today."[147] This may explain how Bolsonaro reacted or adapted to the critics about his [ab]uses of memory. However, one point is consistent: when Bolsonaro promised that the armed forces would save Brazil, he, in his position as a former captain, included himself among them.

Bolsonaro is no longer in power, but this does not mean that the commemorations of March 31st have left the public space. The third Lula administration has approached the subject with caution. On January 31, 2023, the Brazilian Ministry of Defence, José Múcio, was asked in an interview whether the government feared that Bolsonaro supporters could attempt another January 8th on March 31st of that year and whether the government would try to prevent it. Múcio said

[147] Ibdem.

that he was negotiating with the Army on not to have celebrations of March 31st and endorsed that, as a society, we need to move on and forget it: "The biggest point is pacification. (...). I think the first step is to stop looking in the rearview mirror. It appears that the windshield is superior to the rearview mirror. We will have to get there."[148] Since then, the armed forces have no longer issued Orders of the Day for March 31st; the Military Club, on the contrary, have kept organizing its traditional event and gathering uncivil voices.[149]

In 2024, a couple of weeks before the 60th anniversary of the coup d'état, Lula gave an interview where he stated that the coup of 1964 was something of the "past" and that he would not "rehash" the matter "forever". Later, the government also cancelled the official commemorations not to upset the Armed Forces.[150] That frustrated activists who see this administration as an important opportunity to resume the "hegemonic memory" about the military dictatorship. After all, the armed right narratives about the military dictatorship are currently strengthened in Brazil. The next chapter will analyze the Army's Historical Museum and the foundations for the narrative that places the armed forces as the saviours of the nation.

Chapter 3: Army's Historical Museum and Fort Copacabana: Army And Democracy

> In the afternoon of April, knowing I had recovered, [poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade] invited me to walk around. (...) From question to question, we learned that the capture of Fort Copacabana was practically a victory for the rebels against João Goulart's government. The coup strategists assumed a desperate resistance

[148] "Múcio condemns acts, calls for pacification and comments on possible punishment of military personnel," *Band Jornalismo*, January 31, 2023.
[149] "Festa do Golpe de 64 no Rio Tem Militares de Bengala e Camisa da Seleção" https://tab.uol.com.br/noticias/redacao/2023/03/31/nao-foi-ditadura-ne-clube-militar-comemora-golpe-de-64-no-rio.htm (Accesse October 9 2025).
[150] "Com Veto de Lula a Cerimônias, Ministros Se Manifestam Sobre os 60 anos do Golpe Militar de 1964," https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2024/03/31/com-veto-de-lula-a-cerimonias-sete-dos-38-ministros-se-manifestam-sobre-os-60-anos-do-golpe-militar-de-1964.ghtml (Accessed 10 October 2025).

> on the part of the troops based in Rio, who would be prepared to face the troops that General Amauri Kruel was leading from São Paulo, along with the army of General Mourão Filho coming from Juiz de Fora, to occupy Rio, presumably the core of the government allies.
> (...) A shot exploded near us (...). One soldier, just wearing pants from the Navy uniform, with the gun still hot from the shot, kicked something on the ground. (...) We found out that the boy, a worker on a construction site nearby, yelled a "Viva Brizola" (or a "Viva Jango!"), provoking the soldier's wrath. The shot was fired into the air, an intimidating shot according to military rules, but the kicks were not simple intimidation; they were violent on the worker's skinny and defenceless ribs. Almost at the same time, a clamour ran along Atlântica Avenue. The radio reported that the troops based in Rio would not fight against the troops coming from São Paulo and Minas Gerais.
> We returned home. Drummond, with his famous bald head down, as if stepping on an iron floor. I noticed that he was sheepish, his lower jaw tense, making his thin face tremble. I do not know what he was thinking. Or rather: I knew.
>
> Carlos Heitor Cony, *O Ato e o Fato*: *O som e a fúria do que se viu no Golpe de 1964* (Nova Fronteira: Rio de Janeiro, 2014).

Rio de Janeiro plays a prominent role in narratives that tell the behind-the-scenes story of the coup d'état of 1964. Although the city lost its status as Brazil's capital to Brasília in 1960, it continued to exert strong political influence, and it was home to several military institutions and buildings dating back to 1763. According to the journalist Elio Gaspari, on April 1st the generals Humberto Castelo Branco and Artur da Costa e Silva, the future first and second Presidents of Brazil during the regime, respectively, spent the day moving among hiding places in the southern region of the city of Rio de Janeiro, from where they called upon the 1st Army Division (military jurisdiction over the states of Rio de Janeiro and Espírito Santo) to adhere to the "Revolution." Fort Copacabana joined the coup in the morning, but not its neighbour, the 1st Coastal Artillery Headquarters, where the commander General Antonio Henrique Almeida de Moraes and a few officers remained loyal to the democratically elected Goulart.

Around noon, a car stopped outside the Artillery Headquarters. Colonel Cesar Montagna de Souza, with 19 officers in civilian clothes, invaded the barracks, yelling as "if they were in a battle." This action, excessive and not really necessary to control the situation, was filmed and

aired nationally by TV Rio, whose broadcasting center was across the street.[151] Thousands of people watched what became known as the "capture of Fort Copacabana" and were convinced that the coup d'état was unstoppable. In the army's official history book series about 1964, the army argues that João Goulart was one of these spectators and that he decided to leave the country after the launch of the "Revolution".[152]

In the late afternoon, Castelo Branco stopped hiding and drove to the Fort, where the officers received him with a 24-gun salute from the old Schneider cannons, spreading panic throughout the upper-class neighbourhood of Copacabana in Rio. Afterward, Castello Branco went to the 1st Coastal Artillery. The then-Lieutenant Leonidas Pires Gonçalves witnessed the General discussing the future of the country and the army: Ernesto Geisel, another future president, asked why Castelo would not assume the command of the 1st Army Division. He replied, raising his voice: "Because I will command everything [in Brazil]." This Fort's symbolic meaning to the success of the coup was perhaps one of the reasons that influenced the later Minister of the Army, General Leonidas Pires Gonçalves, to create the Army's Historical Museum and Fort Copacabana (*Museu Histórico do Exército e Forte de Copacabana*, MHEx/FC) in 1987, during the transition to democracy.

General Gonçalves also made the right choice of place to give greater public visibility to the army's history. Rio is the postcard of Brazil, and the Fort is situated at the intersection of Copacabana and Ipanema Beaches, both of which are must-see tourist destinations. Following the boom of tourism in the city in the 2000s, the Fort currently welcomes 35,000 visitors monthly[153]

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[151] Elio Gaspari, *A Ditadura Envergonhada: As Ilusões Armadas* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2004), 95-107.
[152] Aricildes de Moraes Motta, *31 de março: O Movimento Revolucionário e a Sua História* (Rio de Janeiro, Biblioteca do Exército, 2003), 167.
[153] Altair Alves, "Forte de Copacabana Celebra 110 Anos com Entrada Gratuita e Programação Especial," *Diário Do Rio*, September 19, 2024.

and is considered the third most visited place in Rio, after the Christ the Redeemer and the Sugarloaf Mountain.[154] According to a survey conducted by the museologist Rafael Fraga Gutterres in 2013, most visitors to the Fort are drawn to the stunning views of the Atlantic Ocean, Sugarloaf Mountain, and Copacabana. At least 20 to 30% of these tourists also end up visiting the historical fortification and the exhibitions in the museum, a considerable number since cultural institutions in Rio compete with the beaches for tourists' attention.[155] In a century-old space, at the heart of Copacabana, a neighbourhood renowned for its beauty and cultural vibrancy, the army has the opportunity to share its history with a large audience.

In the global and national contexts, the Army's Historical Museum was established at a time of new curatorial visions and missions for museums. In post-conflict societies, Paul Williams, a scholar of Museum Studies, observed the rise of cultural spaces dedicated to commemorating a mass suffering episode, especially since the 1980s, coining the concept of "memorial museums:" these institutions combine aspects of monuments (a physical landmark), memorials (a way of remembrance that usually presents a metaphorical aesthetic, singular yet collective, prompting a large group to self-identify and perform practices to commemorate), and museums (a space that preserves, interprets, and exhibits a collection).[156] Due to their nature, Williams notes that memorial museums are highly politicized, aiming to present a moral framework in their narratives while offering a more in-depth contextual explanation of their commemorative practices. Brazil joined this global trend three decades after the end of the military dictatorship. Although in 1985 the Council for the Defence of Historical, Archaeological, Artistic and Tourist Heritage of São

[154] Ana Elizabeth Valle de Queiroz, Marisa Egrejas, and Roberto Bartholo, "Visita Turística à Espaços Fortificados: O Caso do Forte de Copacabana, Rio De Janeiro, Brasil," *Anais Do XII Seminário Do Anptur*, (2015), 6.
[155] Rafael Fraga Gutterres, "Entre o Mar e o Militar: O Visitante do Museu Histórico e Forte de Copacabana," (MA Thesis, UNIRIO/MAST, 2013), 66.
[156] Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (Berg: New York, 2007), 7-9.

Paulo (Condephaat) designed two places related to the resistance against the military regime as historic sites, it was not until 2009 that the first memorial museum, the Memorial of Resistance, was opened in the same state.[157] As already mentioned in the introduction, Brazil's memory market was marked by the publication of memoirs and the release of audiovisual productions, such as films and telenovelas ("soap operas"), rather than politics of memory. Discussing this topic through memorial museums was not a possibility at that time for either the military or state terrorism victims. However, the MHEx/FC subverted the memorial museum logic, joining the trend identified by Cynthia Milton of museums that returned to the essence of memorials and monuments (and traditional museums): celebrating the nation and its (military) heroes.[158]

The army also made use of the discussions about their "right" to memory and culture, paradoxically influenced by the transition to democracy. Academic debates on cultural history, narratives, and representation shed light on the importance of preserving and telling the histories of marginalized groups. In Brazil, social movements catalyzed this discussion, demanding the State's recognition of different memories and increasing popular participation, thereby fostering the democratization of cultural heritage councils at the municipal, state, and national levels to varying extents. These institutions, which have traditionally defined Brazilian heritage as architectural, colonial, and Christian, also began to nominate sites, rituals, and objects belonging

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[157] From 1980 onwards, Condephaat expanded the definition of cultural heritage beyond the architectural meaning. It also instituted a "counter policy," by which any citizen could submit a designation proposal, acknowledging the memory of different groups. Groups involved in the resistance against the regime took advantage of this policy, and were successful in approving two sites: the Arch of the Tiradentes Prison, where many political prisoners were incarcerated, including Dilma Rousseff, and the former building of the Faculty of Sciences and Letters of the University of São Paulo (FFCL/USP), a symbol of the student movement. The Memorial of Resistance is a public museum, owned by the state government, and was a result of the mobilization of the Forum of Former Political Prisoners and Persecuted Persons of the State of São Paulo. About Condephaat counter policy, see Marly Rodrigues, *Imagens do Passado: a Instituição do Patrimônio em São Paulo, 1969-1987* (São Paulo: Unesp/Imprensa Oficial do Estado/Condephaat/Fapesp, 2000); about the patrimonialization of the military dictatorship in São Paulo, Deborah Neves, *A Persistência do Passado: Patrimônio e Memoriais da Ditadura em São Paulo e Buenos Aires* (Alameda: São Paulo, 2018), and about the Memorial of Resistance, Kátia Felipini Neves, *Memorial da Resistência de São Paulo* (Governo do Estado de São Paulo: São Paulo, 2009).

[158] Cynthia Milton, *Conflicted Memory*, 137.

to Afro-Brazilian communities, as well as to the labour movement, to cite some examples. This trend also reflected the creation of local and community museums and the opening of university and college courses in Museology, increasing the number of professionals in this field.[159] In a process explained in the next section, the army joined this trend by establishing a museum after decades of effort and offering the first professional opportunity to many newly graduated museologists in Rio.

At first glance, the Army's Historical Museum appears to be a contradiction. On the one hand, the authoritarian actors (that is, army personnel) exploited the democratic winds of culture to promote the army's memory. On the other hand, while new museums at that time approached communities' histories and everyday life, the army opted for a "grander" and more traditional historical museum model that focused on a narrative of the most significant events in national history. While scholarship on the MHEx/FC has concentrated on its tourist aspect or the curation of military history, and was written mainly by individuals working for the army, my study sheds light on the post-conflict perspective.[160] After losing power, the army sought alternative means to legitimize its actions and secure a place of public engagement in the new reality. As the recent past was poignant and controversial, the army emphasized the tradition, particularly colonial history, while aiming to disseminate the image of an army committed to preserving its historical heritage and Brazilian military history. The creation of the MHEx/FC is a statement: the army's

[159] See Myrian Sepúlveda dos Santos, "Museus Brasileiros e Política Cultural", *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* 19, no. 55 (June 2004): 53-73.

[160] In addition to the works already cited of Ana Elizabeth Valle de Queiroz, Marisa Egrejas, and Roberto Bartholo "Visita Turística à Espaços Fortificados", and Rafael Gutterres "Entre o Mar e o Militar," other studies are: Luiz Fernando Magdalena, "Forte de Copacabana, Casa da Cultura e do Civismo," VI Seminário Regional de Cidades Fortificadas e Primeiro encontro Técnico de Gestores de Fortificações (March 31 - April 2, 2010), Fernanda Cristina Nunes Pontes Marques, A Musealização de uma Fortificação: Um Estudo Sobre o Forte de Copacabana e Sua Ressonância, (MA Thesis, UNIRIO/MAST, 2019), and Igor Santos Huguenin, "Análise do Circuito de Visitação do Museu Histórico do Exército e Forte de Copacabana Como Fonte de Divulgação Institucional," Caderno Temático - *Anais do XVI SIAT - Seminário Internacional Analítico de Temas Interdisciplinares* 5 (2020).

commitment to Brazil predates the last 21 years in power, and would continue in the democratic era.

This chapter aims to analyze the MHEx/FC and the official historical narrative presented about the army, based on visits to the museum between 2021 and 2024, during which I took public guided tours with cadets, and analyzed the exhibition. As archival work was not possible, I conducted interviews with people who have worked in the institution, and they will be introduced anonymously throughout this work.[161] Another source was the book *Forte de Copacabana: Tiros de Cultura na Cidade*, written by Colonel José Luiz Freitas, who served as commandant of the Fort of Copacabana from 1994 to 1996. The chapter is divided into four parts. It begins by providing a historical overview of the Fort, the foundation of the museum, and analyzing how the army has used this place to establish dialogue with civil society after the military dictatorship. This engagement strategy transformed the space into a hub of sociability within its territory. Secondly, this work examines the current permanent exhibition on the Colonial-Imperial and Republican periods (1500-1945) and its curated silence regarding the military dictatorship, which will be briefly explored. Lastly, this section analyzes the "Military Presidents Room," which was opened in 2008 as part of the permanent exhibit, and its replacement in 2019 with an exhibition honouring the Brazilian army's leadership role in the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), a shift that reflected an attempt to place the military as positive agents within the human rights movement. This research argues that the MHEx/FC has demonstrated the army's

[161] According to the Arquivo Histórico do Exército's policy, the institution can sue researchers who use the documentation for topics not aligned with the army. For more information: https://www.ahex.eb.mil.br/images/DDA/2022/Atendimento_ao_Publico/Requerimento_de_Pesquisa.pdf

capacity to refashion itself in response to or adapt to "memory cycles" (to borrow Rebecca Atencio's term) in Brazil, thereby legitimizing its political and social role in the nation's destiny.[162]

1. A Fort on Atlântica Avenue and a Project for a Museum

First years

Visiting the Fort of Copacabana is a remarkable experience: the tourist crosses a white portico, walks along the Alameda Otávio Correa, and is greeted by a stunning view of Copacabana Beach to the left. On the other side, the former barracks house the Museum and two restaurants that are always busy. At the end of this avenue is the fortification. Tourists can walk along its walls and enter the structure where the old cannons were once controlled. Finally, visitors can climb to the top of the fortress to see the weaponry and enjoy a view of the open sea.

Figure 3.1 - Entrance of the Fort Copacabana
(Photograph by Foco na Viagem)

[162] Rebecca Atencio argued that public attention to the memory of the military dictatorship in Brazil recurred in cycles, identifying a pattern where artistic or cultural productions have a role in reviving interest in the period, and the state, also pressured by glassroot groups, answers with politics of memory. Rebecca Atencio, *Memory's Turn: Reckoning with Dictatorship in Brazil* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014).

Figure 3.2 - View from the fortress
(Photograph by Ana Paula Bertho)

In the past, this strategically favourable view was the criterion for the construction of the Fort between 1908 and 1914, as part of the Guanabara Bay defensive system. The same place was also formely known as *Ponta da Igrejinha* due to the chapel in honour of Our Lady of Copacabana, whose name the neighbourhood later adopted. Unlike the fortifications erected between the 16th and 18th centuries to expand and consolidate the colony, this 20th-century fortress in Rio was part of a project designed after the Brazilian Naval Revolts to modernize and improve the defence of the capital region from enemies on the Bay.[163] With the advancement of aviation over the 20th century, the coastal artillery system became obsolete, which was noted by an official letter from a commandant in 1969, stating that the Fort had lost its effectiveness.[164] There is scarce information available about the use of this space during the military dictatorship: banners in the Fort driveway mention only the hosting of civic activities for residents of Copacabana, and the Fort does not

[163] Brazilian Naval Revolts were riots led by the Navy between 1891 and 1894 against the first two presidents, the army Marshals Deodoro da Fonseca and Floriano Peixoto. These revolts aimed to challenge the army's superior status in the new republic, and the president's concentration of power. In 1893, the Navy bombed the coast of the city of Rio de Janeiro. Júlia Kern Castro, "Revolta da Armada." https://riomemorias.com.br/memoria/revolta-da-armada-2/ (Accessed 1 August 2025).

[164] Fernanda Cristina Nunes Pontes Marques, "A Musealização de uma Fortificação: Um Estudo Sobre o Forte de Copacabana e Sua Ressonância", (MA Thesis, UNIRIO/MAST, 2019): 54-55.

figure on the list of places of memory of repression in Rio. Based on the limited sources of information available, it appears that the space remained a military unit until 1987, when General Leônidas Gonçalves decided to assign another function to this space, that is, turning the Fort into a museum.

A couple of months earlier, in December 1986, General Gonçalves successfully concluded a long saga to create a museum for the army. The first initiative to preserve military history dates back to the transfer of capital from Salvador to Rio in 1763, when the Vice-Roy, Dom Antônio Álvares da Cunha, ordered the preservation of an army collection in Rio. A century later, in 1865, the Minister of War, Dr. Ângelo Muniz da Silva Ferraz, the Baron of Uruguaiana, instructed the creation of a museum to exhibit interesting weapons, equipment, and inventions. The museum opened in 1869 and operated until 1902 at the War Arsenal, when the collection was relocated and stored for almost twenty years. Although a new attempt was made to reorganize a military museum in 1922, the National Historical Museum was established in the same year, incorporating part of the stored collection. In the post-World War II period, American military academies expressed interest in acquiring the collection. Nevertheless, the army abandoned the negotiations and decided to establish the Military Museum of the Army in 1953, which was subsequently relocated to various spaces until 1964. Following the coup d'état, the then-Minister of War, Arthur da Costa e Silva, established a commission to reorganize the museum. The institution operated in the Historical Houses of Deodoro and Osorio under inadequate conditions until Gonçalves issued the Ordinance No. 016 in 1987, which disbanded the 3rd Coastal Artillery Group based at the Fort, and ordered the transfer of the collection to the MHEx/FC. According to an official publication, from then on, the Fort "exchanged weapons [from firearms to culture]", "its cannons became silent," and it started to disseminate everything the army "did and does for Brazil and in overseas

missions for democracy and world peace."[165] This passage appears to be a metaphor for the transition of the army from its military government to a search for ways to influence civil society. The barracks were no longer the only pathway and influence within democracy.

Despite the enthusiasm involved, MHEx faced financial challenges in its early years of operation. The 1980s are often referred to as "the lost decade" due to hyperinflation, crippling foreign debt, prolonged economic stagnation, and political instability, marked by José Sarney's government (1985-1989) and Fernando Collor's administration (1990-1992) (the latter was impeached due to its disastrous financial policies and corruption). The economic crisis hastened the end of the military dictatorship but was not fully resolved until the introduction of a new currency, the real, in 1994, and a series of financial reforms.[166]

One of the interviewees for this research, referred to here as "Professor," worked at the MHEx/FC between 1987 and 2000 and described his first seven years there as a period of "quixotic work." He had just completed his undergraduate studies in Museology and Fine Arts and was invited to join a team of volunteers as a conservator. Although the collection brought from the historic houses required extensive work, there were few, if any, financial resources available to support this work.[167] Until 1992, working without pay, he established a makeshift laboratory to process and restore portraits, photographs, written documents, uniforms, weapons, swords, flags, insignia, and the Rondon Commission collection.[168] This initial behind-the-scenes work, along

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[165] Museu Histórico do Exército, *Museu Histórico do Exército* (Art Técnica Comunicação: Rio de Janeiro, 2009), 10-17.
[166] See Miriam Leitão, *Saga Brasileira: A Longa Luta de Um Povo Por Sua Moeda* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2011).
[167] "The Professor," interview by Ana Paula Santana Bertho, September 7, 2023, online.
[168] Marshal Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon (1865-1958) led missions to expand the telegraph networking in the interior, where he encountered isolated Indigenous nations. He established the Serviço de Proteção ao Índio (Indian Protection Service) in 1910. See Jorge Miguel Mayer, "Rondon, Cândido," Verbetes - Primeira República/CPDOC-FGV." https://cpdoc.fgv.br/sites/default/files/verbetes/primeira-republica/RONDON,%20C%C3%A2ndido (Accessed 15 August 2015).

with the museum's reorganization and the funding constraints, delayed the development of the long-term exhibition project, which was not opened until the museum's 10th anniversary in 1996.

In addition to financial constraints, another recurring theme in the interviewees' accounts of the museum concerned the army's administrative model, which persists to this day. Both the director of the Directorate of the Historical and Cultural Heritage of the Brazilian Army (DPHCEx), responsible for coordinating and overseeing activities related to the preservation of the Army's heritage, and the directors of each cultural unit are active military personnel, and, to progress in their career, change command every two years. These colonels do not necessarily come from or are engaged in the field of cultural heritage, and they are sometimes assigned to these units as a form of respite from their regular military duties. After all, the core duty of a commander is to train combat personnel rather than to oversee a museum.[169] In the case of the first three directors, Colonels Romeu Antônio Ferreira (1987-1990), Ferdinando Algayer Dutra (1990-1992), and Oscar Augusto Teixeira Neto (1992-1994), they also faced the challenge of transforming a military unit into a cultural space. From an institutional perspective, there was interest in integrating the army into the cultural landscape. However, this did not translate into concrete cultural policies, the professional investment of its members, or the allocation of financial resources. Overall, the success of a cultural unit depends largely on the commander's willingness and commitment to the role.

The Army's Historical Museum (MHEx/FC) in the 1990s

[169] Interviewees cited the Navy and Air Force as counterexamples. In these institutions, directors are reservist military personnel hired for terms of up to ten years. The Navy employs numerous career military staff in technical roles, including many trained museologists. The Air Force, in addition to military museologists, also contracts a significant number of civilian professionals.

A turning point in the museum's history was the nomination of Colonel José Luiz Freitas in 1994. Both the historiography and the interviewees unanimously agreed that he was responsible for structuring the museum, which increased the visibility of the Fort and added the Army's Historical Museum on Rio's tourist map. Born in Rio, Freitas served in different places across the country and returned to the city in 1993 after commanding the 3rd Special Border Battalion (now the 3rd Jungle Infantry Battalion) in the Amazon Rainforest. In his memoir *Forte de Copacabana: Tiros de Cultura na Cidade*, Freitas recalled that he initially declined the invitation to command the MHEx/FC because he had intended to retire. However, his desire to remain in Rio and his conviction that he still had much to contribute to the army ultimately led him to reconsider.[170] He assumed the command in January 1994 and found a place that received few visitors. At that time, the public could walk around old cannons in the Alameda Otávio Correa and visit an exhibition about the Coastal Artillery, which had opened in the fortress the previous year. He also found inside the former barracks a volunteer team that was working on the collection in precarious conditions: the building had structural problems, and the professionals lacked adequate working equipment. At the end of his term in 1996, he successfully established external partnerships, transformed the volunteers into full-time employees, opened the Colony-Empire room for the long-term exhibition "The Army in the Formation of Nationality," and increased visitor numbers. The Fort welcomed 15,000 people in 1995 and 17,000 in 1996, respectively. The visitation has not stopped growing since then.[171]

Freitas's term coincided with a period of economic and political stabilization. The real, the new currency introduced in 1994, helped to control hyperinflation. The success of the monetary

[170] José Luiz Freitas, *Forte de Copacabana: Tiros de Cultura na Cidade* (HBM Gráfica Digital: Fortaleza, 2016), 25-27.
[171] Ibid., 193.

policy boosted the candidacy of the Minister of Finance, FHC, for the presidency of the Republic, which he ultimately won. His neoliberal government (1995-2002) represented the strengthening of Brazilian democracy, reorganizing the party system, producing consensus, and making the political system more governable.[172] This optimistic scenario also created the first opportunity to scrutinize the recent past. While Freitas worked to structure the museum, FHC introduced a bill that led to the Law of Disappearance of 1995. After pressure from human rights groups, the President decided on an indemnification proposal rather than a truth commission. In some way, the *Comissão Especial sobre Mortos e Desaparecidos Políticos* (Special Commission on Political Deaths and Disappearances, CEMDP), created to examine the requests for reparation, was the first step of a politics of memory: it acknowledged the state's responsibility for the disappearance and murder of 475 people, issuing death certificates with this information, and granting financial compensation for families.[173] In this way, understanding the success achieved by the Colonel in the Fort must examine how he and the army responded to this first reparation step. Luiz Freitas's account of his tenure highlights three interesting aspects of the army's process of institutional renewal through cultural initiatives.

First, the Colonel's primary strategies were community engagement and mobilizing public opinion. He actively offered the Fort to local initiatives, fostering a sense of shared ownership, while using public visibility to strengthen institutional support for the cultural unit. He issued passes to local fishermen to fish from the rock adjacent to the fortification, promoted sports competitions between military personnel and civilians, hosted events for the Association of Poets and Reciters and the Copacabana Residents Association, organized art salons, and created a

[172] Marcus Ianoni, "Políticas Públicas E Estado: O Plano Real," *Lua Nova: Revista de Cultura e Politica* 78 (2009): https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-64452009000300009.
[173] Atencio, *Memory's Turn*, 16.

museum choir. Freitas also explored the Fort from both a tourist perspective and a commercial standpoint, working with companies and renovating certain areas for rental purposes. At the same time, he partnered with the state and municipal governments, as well as the local parish, to host projects for socioeconomically vulnerable children. These children spent a few days a week, all day, at the Fort, where they could take a shower, have meals, participate in physical exercises with the soldiers, and learn civics. This project draws attention for showing the Fort establishing a relationship with the Catholic Church, which became, during the military dictatorship, a prominent space for social projects and movements, and for democratically elected governments, while welcoming a group frequently targeted by repressive forces.

Freitas also established a relationship with the media, which began as a response to an article criticizing the cannons on Alameda facing the Copacabana neighbourhood. Newspapers, magazines, and TV channels were invited to visit the space and learn that "the cannons of the Fort would only shoot culture" from now on. This expression, coined by the journalist João Carlos Cataldi, has become a popular saying in the Fort. Freitas chose it as the title of his book, and the phrase is currently printed on the museum tickets. The "Professor" recalled a considerable influx of authorities, politicians and famous TV celebrities visiting his laboratory, the apple of the army's eye due to the "magic" of restoring documents and objects. The guest list featured actors, journalists, and politicians who also served their mandatory military conscription in the Fort, such as the journalist and founder of the Globo TV network, Roberto Marinho. Freitas also recalled visitors who opposed the dictatorship, such as the known communist composer and actor Mario Lago, observing that the "museum contributed to the union of civilians and military." Thereby, Freitas established a good neighbour policy with various groups in Rio to legitimize the place, thereby ensuring broader support.

Another relevant factor to the success of the Fort was Freitas's work in educating military personnel about the importance of the museum as a marketing tool to strengthen the institution's public image. According to the "Professor," there was a paradox: the army chose the Fort Copacabana because "everybody can see the fortification [from the waterfront]," and Copacabana is presented as a culturally vibrant neighbourhood. However:

> I remember them [the Colonels] saying, several times, that in Brasília, for example, they [the Army's high command] were against the museum because they thought the museum in that space was inadequate, incompatible, [because of] the sea air, the high humidity (...). Some [of the army personnel] were more progressive than others and understood the political use of the museum, bringing the army and society closer together through culture.

In this sense, not only did Freitas have to approach civilians, but also military personnel, seeking the collaboration of those progressive superiors and finding ways to persuade others of the importance of adopting a cultural language among civilians. One example that illustrates this internal take was Freitas's partnership with General Zenildo Gonzaga Zoroastro de Lucena, who served as Minister of the Army from 1992 to 1999, when the Ministry of Defence replaced the Ministry of the Army.

Like Freitas, Lucena initiated a dialogue with the new democratic times: on the one hand, reacting to the calls from state deputies, such as Jair Bolsonaro, who demanded the return of the military to power or the closure of the national congress. Lucena came publicly to state he believed democracy would solve its issues through institutional mechanisms, and the armed forces would remain in the barracks.[174] He also agreed with the creation of the CEMDP, and made clear that FHC would be the one deciding about the financial reparations for disappeared people's relatives.[175] On the other hand, he boosted the military personnel's self-esteem and was

[174] "Zenildo Quer Deputados Punidos," *Jornal do Brasil*, November 20, 1993.

[175] Lucena answered the military critiques, particularly from retired military personnel, stating that, "it is not the army's money, the decision belongs to the President. It is a political decision and it does not affect us. Our [personnel] are already granted." Disappeared militaries' relatives had already received financial reparation. General Lucena

a strong "memory entrepreneur" for the army. Among his initiatives were the establishment of the Cultural Affairs Section to formulate policies and strategies for cultural heritage, the opening of the fortifications for public visitation, the creation of Army Day (April 19), and the establishment of the Military Museum Conde de Linhares.

Regarding the Army's Historical Museum, Lucena, who lived in Copacabana, visited the Fort for the first time in 1993, accompanied by his grandchild, wearing civilian clothes. He noticed the tourist potential of the place, and envisioned the wide projection the history of the army could gain.[176] Lucena visited the Fort periodically to check on renovations and the exhibit's progress, and held Freitas accountable to ensure the provision of financial resources. Freitas recalled that Lucena considered the MHEx/FC as a high-level *empresa verde-oliva e cultural* (olive-green and cultural company, referencing the army uniform colour). This business mindset guided the Colonel in inviting military authorities to visit the fortification, explaining how the Museum was "rebranding" the military institution to the public and the importance of reshaping the relationship between the army and civilians.[177]

These approaches to include civilians and the military personnel's efforts to secure support and resources for the Fort were driven by a sense of pride in the army, as well as a resentment of

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argued that he was able to control this "crisis" and FHC conducted very well this matter, depoliticizing the issue in assigning the responsibility for the crimes to the state, not the armed forces. Celso Castro and Maria Celina D'Araújo, "Interview with Zenildo Zoroastro de Lucena," chapter to *Militares e Política na Nova República*, ed. Celso Castro and Maria Celina D'Araújo (Rio de Janeiro: FGV, 2001): 223 - 225.

[176] Flávia Ferreira de Mattos, "Inovação Institucional e Patrimônio Cultural de Origem Militar no Brasil" (Ph.D Dissertation, UFRJ, 2018): 61-62, 84, 100, and 188.

[177] This new business-oriented approach was exemplified in 1996, when a member of the High Command contacted Colonel Freitas requesting that the recently renovated former dining hall should be prepared for the military president Ernesto Geisel's funeral. Freitas explained that the space had already been booked for a wedding, and canceling would incur a high penalty fee. More importantly, rental was the Fort's main source of income, and a cancellation would undermine the space's credibility. The officer insisted and suggested a scenario where the bride and groom's toast would still take place in the dining hall upstairs while, simultaneously, a priest could conduct the rite of committal downstairs, in another room. Negotiations took the funeral to another venue. On one hand, this episode demonstrated how the MHEx/FC gained recognition in the Army, to the point of being considered for the funeral of the penultimate dictator president. On the other hand, it shows that Freitas had to "educate" officers on how the Fort operated in a different logic, not that the strict military rule in which superiors'orders are not questioned. Freitas, 156-157.

the negative image of the military following the dictatorship. Freitas recalled that having the Fort full of general visitors and school groups was an opportunity to present the "true history" of the army and erase stereotypes about the *milicos* (a derogatory term referring to military members). Two of these visitors were FHC and his wife, Ruth Cardoso. In 1995, FHC was expected to use the Fort to land by helicopter and attend an event at another location in Rio. Freitas thought this would be an opportunity for the President to learn that "the army has been a pioneer in many areas of human endeavour," and "wages war [only] if necessary." The helicopter was late, and after landing, FHC proceeded directly to his commitment. Meanwhile, the first lady and the wives of other politicians visited the Fort dining hall, where objects that would later comprise the permanent exhibition were on display. According to Freitas, he could not pass up the opportunity to inform the guests, as most of these people were misinformed and thought the army was all "poorly prepared, square, narrow-minded and did not do anything in the barracks." Ultimately, the wives were very impressed with the army's excellent education and training, as well as dedication to work. A few months later, the Colonel met FHC at a convocation ceremony at the Military Academy and felt flattered when the President mentioned having learned about the museum exhibition project from his wife and congratulated Freitas on his efforts. The Colonel remembered with a sarcastic tone: "What interesting… FHC [an opponent of the dictatorship] was fascinated by the Army and its Historical Museum!"[178]

The book has plenty of similar comments and anecdotes. It is essential to observe that Freitas's account was published in 2016, drawing on facts from 20 years prior, as he stepped down as head of the Museum in 1996. In this sense, how much did Freitas capture the frustration against the PT administration that led to Dilma Rousseff's impeachment? How much did his comments

[178] Freitas, *Forte de Copacabana*,112-121.

reflect emotions felt specifically during his term between 1994 and 1996, or also the resentment backlog from almost 20 years of watching politics of memory? These questions are difficult to answer. It is clear, however, that in recounting some achievements, the author aimed to demonstrate to readers the army's value and to remind them that, in this new memory cycle, their role in the Brazilian nation should not be forgotten. Military personnel are not *milicos*, but rather an essential force in both authoritarian and democratic times.

Overall, MHEx/FC succeeded: Freitas renovated the Alameda Otávio Correa, from the entrance to the fortification, to serve as a *sala de visitas* (reception room) of the Fort. Since then, there has been an entrance fee to visit the Museum. Cadets sell tickets and welcome visitors in uniform, sometimes also wearing military historical attire. At the Alameda, everybody can currently enjoy the view from the benches or have a coffee at one of the two restaurants on the property, including a branch of the traditional coffeehouse Confeitaria Colombo. The permanent exhibition, which will be analyzed in the next section, was opened in 1996. The fortification features an exhibit on coastal artillery and has also been rented, along with other spaces on the property, for external exhibitions. From those first years, the relationship with various community groups, especially social projects, has largely ceased, and the majority of visitors are domestic and international tourists. After nearly four decades, there is no question that it has become a legitimate space for culture, memory, and tourism in Rio de Janeiro.

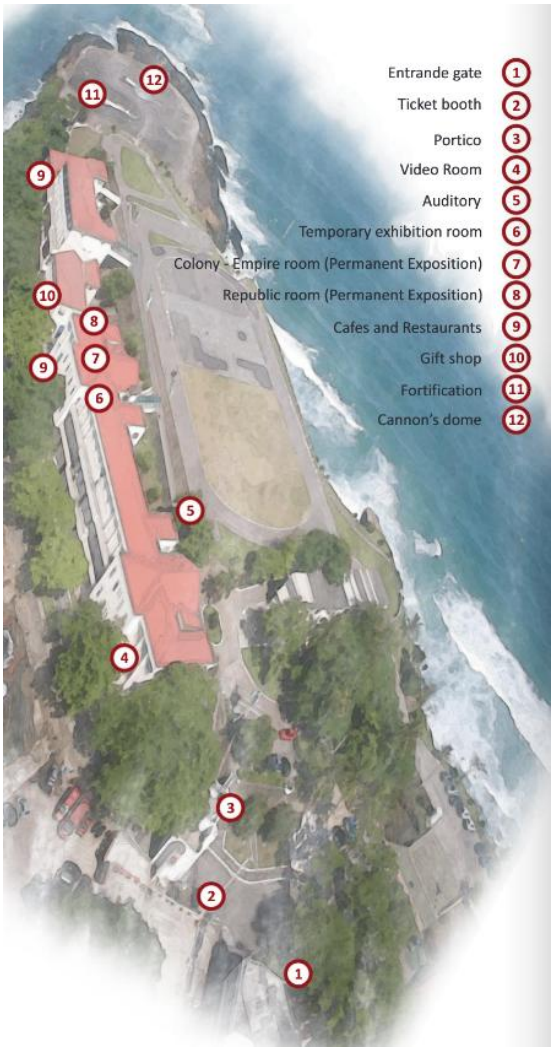

Figure 3.3: Map of the current attractions for visitors in the Fort
(Map by MHEx/FC)

2. Army: The Eternal Guardian of Brazil

Building the exhibition

The permanent exhibition "The Army in the Formation of Nation" was gradually opened over time: the room "Colony-Empire" was inaugurated in September 1996, in the same month that

FHC initiated the financial reparation program for victims of the dictatorship. The Republic room was completed two years later, in December 1998.

Despite erecting the permanent exhibition, very little information is available about its development. Following the creation of the MHEx in 1986, the Secretaria Geral do Exército issued a guideline to establish a commission to study and reorganize the museum, emphasizing the mission of disseminating the army's history as an example of civic duty. The group agreed that adopting a historical museum model would allow the Army to highlight its role in key moments of nation-building, from the "discovery of Brazil" to the Republican Era, highlighting the army's "eternal defence" of the territory.[179] This information did not impress my interviewee, who is referred to here as the "Archivist". Having worked in various military cultural settings, including the Fort, she noted that military personnel are fascinated by historical timelines, even though they become outdated quickly. However, she did not find any documents from 1986 to 1996 discussing which historical episodes should be represented or what the theoretical and visual sources for the new exhibition would be.[180]

Freitas's memoir and the interviews filled some gaps. The Colonel argued that the idea was to have an exhibit narrating the political history of the army, which was part of the national history. As references, he cited books by historians Pedro Calmon and Antônio José Borges Hermida, who authored the most widely used history textbooks in the 1960s and 1970s.[181] Both instructors at the Pedro II School (a prestigious federal public school, named after the second and last emperor of

[179] Nunes Pontes Marques, 60.

[180] "The Archivist,"interview by Ana Paula Santana Bertho, December 22, 2023, Rio de Janeiro.

[181] Freitas mentioned both authors, but did not specify any title. The "Historian" gave me two examples: Pedro Calmon, *História da Civilização Brasileira* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1940), and Antonio José Borges Hermida, *História do Brasil, para a Primeira Série Ginasial* (São Paulo: Editora do Brasil, 1957). These books had multiple editions over the 1960-1970s decades. See André Átila Fertig and Neandro Thesing, "O Processo de Independência Brasileiro em Livros Didáticos Tradicionais: Instrumento à Nação," *Revista Latino-Americana De História* 2, no. 6 (August 2013): 684-699.

Brazil), these authors presented a nationalist discourse in their historiographical production, grounded in historical narratives about the colonial period established after independence from Portugal in 1822. The "Professor" and the "Historian," another interviewee for this research, confirmed this information regarding the bibliography that supported the exhibit. The "Historian," who has researched military history for more than four decades and currently works at the National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN), added that other bibliographic references include the three volumes of *History of the Brazilian Army* from 1972, the same year of the 150th anniversary of Brazilian Independence, a crucial patriotic event for the military regime.[182] In this way, the new exhibition was rooted in traditional narratives that drew a line of continuity between the colonial past and the authoritarian project, with the army playing a crucial role in national identity.

In a second phase, Freitas envisioned that, when completed, the Republican Era portion of the exhibit would conclude its timeline in 1946, when the Military Academy, known as AMAN, relocated from Rio to Resende, in the interior of the state. What remains unexplored in the bibliography on the MHEx/FC — and it is one of the findings of my thesis — is that the Colonel also had plans to approach the institution's role after 1946. First, he mentioned plans for MHEx/FC to have a room dedicated to peace missions in Brazil and abroad. Later on, he cited instead a travelling exhibition, listing a series of paintings that would be commissioned to illustrate critical historical events. Although there is no information that these artworks were painted, it is worth noting that the list included two about the "Revolution of 1964," one of the troops in march [to

[182] "The Historian," interview by Ana Paula Santana Bertho, December 15, 2023, online. The military dictatorship utilized the 150th anniversary as a propaganda for the regime, promoting an idea of optimism about the present context and the future of the country. The program included nationalistic events, such as soccer games, Catholic masses, and, above all, the moving of the first Emperor of Brazil, D. Pedro I's remains (except his heart), from Portugal (that was also a dictatorship in that moment) to Brazil. See João Paulo Pimenta and Janaina Martins Cordeiro,"*Projetos políticos, Autoritarismo e Exclusão nas Comemorações da Independência do Brasil*."

Rio], and another one about the soldiers returning from the "Movement of 1964."[183] This last painting probably refers to the troops returning to the barracks. It is noteworthy that this proposal framed 1964 as a punctual intervention, implicitly suggesting that the army as an institution had little or no responsibility for the dictatorship that lasted until 1985. The following list of paintings did not depict actual peace missions abroad, but rather to the army's role in humanitarian crises or regular operations in the five geographical regions of Brazil.

The interviewees had never seen any of these paintings in the MHEx/FC collection. "Professor" believed that, at least, the artwork about 1964 was not commissioned at all because the technical team of civilians confronted Freitas and Colonel Valmor Falkemberg Boelhouwer, his successor. The museologists argued that "they could not approach 1964; the exhibit's goal was to show the army's role in the formation of nationality," in other words, in a distant past.[184] There are no other sources that concur with this view. Although Freitas, for example, is remembered by those interviewed as someone who was transparent with the technical staff, in his memoir, he did not acknowledge the influence of civilians on his museological decisions. Other works on military and civilian culture in that context suggest that relations were cordial but tense, and the former had the final say.[185] A possible explanation in this case was the lack of opportunities to approach 1964 in that political context; there was a will, but the political moment was not conducive. In the end,

[183] Freitas, *Forte de Copacabana*, 122 and 188.

[184] At this point of the interview, the "Professor" stated a mea culpa. He explained that although the civilian team criticized the inclusion of other brutal historical episodes, such as the Canudos War (1896-1897), they did not oppose all of them at that time. He cited as an example the *Bandeiras*, settlers's missions involved in the conquest and defence of the territory and consequent genocide of Indigenous people between 16th and 18th centuries, and who are considered the precursors of the army. His point raises an interesting question about how colonialism is rooted and normalized. It reminded me of the similar discussions around CNV final report that found that at least 8,350 Indigenous were killed during the regime, but controversily left them out of the final and official account of Deaths and Disappearances. See Iára Quelho de Castro, Miguel Rodrigues de Sousa Neto, and Vera Lúcia Ferreira Vargas, "Os Povos Indígenas e a Ditadura: Violência, Memória e História," *Historia Revista* 29, no. 1 (Jan./April 2024): 123–140.

[185] See Mattos, "Inovação Institucional E Patrimônio Cultural de Origem Militar no Brasil," 86.

the Brazilian participation in the Second World War was selected as the final episode of the long-term exhibition timeline. Far from provoking any potential controversy, the fight along the Allied Powers against Nazi-Fascism demonstrated undoubtedly that the army was on the right side of history.

Visiting the exhibition

The permanent exhibition occupies two floors of the former barracks *Quartel da Paz*: visitors begin on the third floor with the Colony-Empire room, and go downstairs to the second floor, where the narrative continues with the Republic room. On the first floor/ lobby, the institution hosts temporary exhibitions related or not to military history. The historical timeline of the permanent exhibition begins in 1500, although the military as an institution was officially established only in 1824, after the Independence. Before entering the Colony-Empire room, there is a plaque with the quote: "We all pass, Brazil remains. We all disappear, Brazil remains. Brazil is eternal. And the army must be the watchful guardian for the eternity of Brazil." Attributed to Gustavo Barroso, the first director of the National Historical Museum (one of Brazil's main museums) and one of the leaders of the far-right and fascist party Brazilian Integralist Action in the 1930s, the phrase works as a preface for the narrative that places the army as a condition for the continuity of the nation.

Walking into the room, the visitor sees an exhibit composed of dioramas or cycloramas. There are fifteen such staged replicas for the period from 1500 to 1889, and eleven for the period from 1891 to 1945. Historian, Cynthia Milton had already observed in the case of Peru that state security museums are stuck in old museological practices, poorly interactive, and do not aim to

engage the audience.[186] According to the "Professor," in 1995, Freitas and other military personnel working on culture travelled to Portugal, France, and England to visit military museums, with support from Minister General Lucena. Upon their return, they attempted to reproduce this "modern European" aesthetic to present the Brazilian army's history. To address the lack of objects before the 19th century in the collection, Freitas hired military artists to paint landscapes on the walls, create framed paintings, and make replicas of colonial weapons. The result is a scenario that reproduces an outdoor setting (a forest, a beach, or a battlefield) or an indoor setting (a parlour or an office), populated with mannequins (made with glass eyes and natural hair) dressed in historical attire and carrying armaments. These historical figures assume a static pose, as if they are stuck in time, much like the museum itself. In this manner, the permanent exhibition was outdated from its inauguration, both aesthetically and narratively.

Although the immense flow of visitors and the work of civilian museologists have compelled the museum to communicate with the public, the long-term exhibition aesthetic poses challenges to engagement. MHEx/FC has an Instagram account with 181,000 followers, but barely features the dioramas in its posts.[187] Regarding signage, each diorama has its own sign explaining the historical context of that episode, the characters they represent and information about some objects, especially the weapons. While these plaques allowed visitors comprehend the displays, they are now 30 years old, and the texts are simple, encyclopedic, and tiring to follow. In 2018, the institution included QR Codes on each showcase that directed to a YouTube Channel with

[186] Milton, *Conflicted Memory*,150-152.

[187] Most of the content shared is related to military groups visiting the museum - usually celebrated with a group picture in front of the white Portico in the entrance -, and events in the Fort. Dioramas from the exhibition usually illustrate posts about civic festivities, such as Independence Day. See Museu Histórico do Exército e Forte de Copacabana (@fortedecopacabana), https://www.instagram.com/fortedecopacabana/.

short videos of a military member explaining each historical episode. However, the narration essentially repeats the written content on the signs while martial music plays in the background.

Given the static and poorly scripted exhibition, I looked forward to taking a guided tour of the exhibit. MHEx offers public tours every hour with admission, and they are conducted by cadets, all of whom are men. Tours are an interactive opportunity in which interpreters give voice to the narratives, and have the potential to foster a meaningful connection between visitors and the heritage. For this reason, I was also curious whether the guides would attempt to intertwine the army's history and democratic values. I attended two public guided tours, and at the beginning, the cadets stated that there were different points of view about the history of Brazil, and that this exhibition was from the army's perspective. They stopped at every single diorama, covering the two floors in 45 minutes. Overall, they shared a script that, at the same time, effaced and celebrated the state violence over time and the heroic role of the army, aligned with the classic military historiography. Nonetheless, they also emphasized contemporary topics as a way to generate empathy among the visitors.

In the Colony-Empire room, my tour guides spent considerable time explaining the diorama about the Guararapes Battle on April 19, 1648. After explaining that "Indigenous people were naturally insolent," and that justified their conflict with settlers, the guides highlighted the bravery of Indigenous nations, Portuguese, and Black people to unite and fight the Dutch invasion in Pernambuco. This historical episode was relevant to the 1970s historiography used as a reference, as the union of the three founding groups that initiated the Brazilian independence process. Still, Guararapes also earned another meaning after the military dictatorship. The anthropologist Celso Castro notes that with the decay of the celebrations for March 31st, the army needed to invent another tradition to commemorate the institution. In 1994, General Zenildo de

Lucena, also born in Pernambuco, argued that the Guararapes Battle represented the first use of the term "nation" by the three ethnic groups fighting for Independence, and the birth of the nation was intertwined with the birth of the army. That was why he argued that April 19 should be Army Day.[188] Unlike celebrating a controversial recent coup d'état and a dictatorship, Guararapes legitimizes the long tradition of the army and celebrates Brazilian racial diversity. The historical episode highlights their union against an external enemy, contrasting with the 21 years of dictatorship, during which there were internal opponents. Since then, the army has organized festivities on this date, and the museum has promoted this narrative since 1996.

Figure 3.4: On the left, a diorama about the *Bandeiras* movement, set in a forest landscape with mannequins of famous *bandeirantes* and one Indigenous person (typical representation for an early to mid-20th century museum, but one that is nevertheless offensive, in a position of inferiority). On the right, a diorama about the Guararapes battle with mannequins of the "Brazilian" leaders.

(Photograph by Ana Paula Bertho)

There are other examples throughout the exhibition of how the Museum sets dialogue between the remote past and the post-conflict period. One is the process of constructing the figure of Luís Alves de Lima e Silva, known as the Duke of Caxias, as the patron of the army and a

[188] Celso Castro, *A Invenção do Exército Brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2002): 53-55.

national hero (a case that Celso Castro also studied), which is widely supported by the exhibition. According to the anthropologist, in the early 1990s, the Black Movement criticized Caxias for having murdered Black soldiers who fought on behalf of Brazil (under Pedro II) in the Paraguayan War (1864-1870). Nonetheless, his figure occupied a broad space in the exhibit opened in 1996: there are banners with his biography, and two dioramas are dedicated to him, including a large painting reproduction of the Santa Monica Farm, where he spent his last days, that serves as a landscape/scenario for his litter. There is no mention of those critiques. Caxias, whom Bolsonaro also dedicated his vote in favour of Rousseff's impeachment in 2016, together with Colonel Ustra (the known torturer during the dictatorship), is remembered by the tour guides as someone who fought the *dictatorship* of the Paraguayan President Francisco Solano López Carrillo (1862-1870). No words about the brutality of the conflict that killed two-thirds of the Paraguayan population, and devastated their economy.[189]

Later, in the Republic room, the guides reminded visitors that in 1889, the army led a coup d'état against Emperor Pedro II because civilians came to the barracks asking for support to establish the republican system, a similar narrative to indicate the civil support in 1964. Another example in the Republic Room was the diorama of the Copacabana Fort Revolt of 1922: this was the first of a series of military uprisings led by lieutenants against the oligarchic political system during the First Republic (1889-1930). The Fort, which had joined the movement, ended up surrounded by legalist forces. A group of 18 rebels marched on Atlântica Avenue and were met with gunfire.[190] During the tour, the cadets described it as a military rebellion against the

[189] Scholarship explains that the conflict aimed to destabilize Paraguay 's protectionist and politically independent economy, benefiting the Triple Alliance of Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay, and ultimately England. Pedro Fuini, "Guerra do Paraguai - Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas - Universidade de São Paulo," https://www.fflch.usp.br/43329 (Accessed 31 August 2025).

[190] Júlia Kern Castro, "Revolta dos 18 do Forte," http://riomemorias.com.br/memoria/revolta-dos-18-do-forte/ (Accessed 31 August 2025). Freitas explored extensively the "spirit of the 18 of the Fort," which included reproducing their uniforms and establishing their use by the cadets in the museum entrance.

oligarchies that governed the country in the first Republic, adding the anachronic comparison that they were “as corrupted as the current [civilian] governments.” Visiting the long-term exhibition revealed that its curation was based on 1970s military literature. Yet, it also aligned with the values the army sought to associate with in the 1990s, when the exhibition was opened, and the new democratic era. The guided tours in the 2020s continue to share these narratives and include contemporary examples, strengthening the notion that the army watches and cares for the nation.

Figure 3.5: Tour guide and visitors in front of the diorama about the Royal Military Academy. (Photograph by Ana Paula Bertho)

Figure 3.6: On the left, diorama of the 1922 Copacabana Fort Revolt. In the back right, part of the diorama of the Second World War
(Photograph by Ana Paula Bertho)

The final diorama is about Brazil's participation in the Second World War. In this staged scene, the Brazilian Expeditionary Force (FEB) is portrayed as decisive for the liberation of the Italian region of Emilia-Romagna in 1945. In this way, the long-term exhibition continues to curate silence about the military dictatorship but rather curates their heroic endeavours.

3. The Military Presidents Room

In 2013, I travelled to Rio for the first time for a conference. Due to time constraints, I focused my visit on the most touristic sites, such as the Christ Redeemer and Sugarloaf Mountain. One morning, while walking along the seafront of Copacabana Beach, I stumbled upon Fort Copacabana. Like most tourists, I was drawn in by the gorgeous views and ended up visiting the museum as well. My most vivid memory of the visit was stepping into a room in the middle of the permanent exhibition and facing a portrait of Emílio Médici, one of the military presidents during the dictatorship. I was shocked and decided to leave the museum. However, once outside and on my way to the exit, I regretted my attitude. After all, I was a historian, and I should face reality: if

visitors were interacting with this exhibition, I also had to know what they were seeing. I came back, and it was a room highlighting the technocratic achievements of military presidents without any word about human rights violations during the dictatorship.

Almost a decade later, when I returned to the MHEx/FC in 2021, I walked around the permanent exhibition and could no longer find that room. I asked the group of cadets in the white portico about a "room with military presidents," and they answered that the room did not exist. I insisted, mentioning my memories of my last visit, and one of them suggested that it could have been a temporary exhibit. This did not match my memories of a room, not the lobby on the first floor, where the temporary exhibitions are held. Apart from my interest in analyzing the room's content, I also wondered: where was that room? When did this exhibit open, and under what circumstances? Why and when was it closed?

Through research, I was able to answer some of these questions and developed hypotheses for others. I found some pictures of the Military Presidents Room on TripAdvisor and in a publication released by the MHEx/FC, but above all, on *Akangatu*, the Brazilian Army's Museological repository. The pictures included in this section are screenshots from the virtual tour of the Museum available on *Akangatu* website, which also allows zooming in and reading the curatorial texts.[191] While this set of materials enabled abalysis the curatorial choices, it still left space for many questions about what happened behind the scenes. When asked about the topic in the interviews, some participants reported not remembering the exhibit, and others seemed unwilling to talk about it, answering my questions vaguely. This discomfort indicates the level of controversy regarding that room.

[191] Museu Histórico do Exército e Forte de Copacabana, Akangatu, https://akangatu.eb.mil.br/2021/06/11/museu-historico-forte-copacabana-acervo/ (accessed on September 1, 2025). The post with the virtual tour was published on June 11, 2021.

From what I was able to figure out based on these interviews and my memory of the visit in 2013, the Military Presidents Room was on the left of the stairs for those coming from the third floor (Colony-Empire room), while the Republic Room entrance was on the right side, on the second floor. I could not find the exhibit because the space is currently empty, serving only as a hall for the elevator. There is considerable evidence that the Military Presidents Room was not a temporary exhibit. A stainless steel plaque on the wall demonstrated the intention to eternalize the opening as a milestone. The date, Friday, March 28, 2008, barely hid the connection with March 31st, which that year fell on a Monday, the day the museum is closed. The entrance sign for the exhibit featured green and yellow stripes, following the same visual identity present in the permanent exhibition in the Colony-Empire and Republic-Room. As shown on the virtual tour available on Akangatu, the "Military Presidents of Brazil 1889-1985 Exhibition" consisted of 10 wooden displays in wooden cases: one was for the curatorial text and nine for each president in chronological order, containing his picture, a text about his government, and a few of his belongings. Unlike the Colony-Empire and Republic rooms that are wide enough to accommodate several dioramas, this display option was probably a solution for that small room.

According to the curatorial text for the President's Room, since the beginning of the Republic in 1889, there were nine different moments when military leaders held the presidency. Different moments imply unrelated governments and distinct circumstances, but five of the nine were presidents during the military dictatorship. Although the contexts between 1964 and 1985 varied with respect to societal support and the health of the economy, this period must still be understood as part of the same project. Still, the curatorial text presented popular themes in the military historical narrative about the regime, and attempted to generalize them to all the military presidents, highlighting the accomplishment of high economic levels and the guarantee of

democracy. It also states that those militaries would have been able to meet Brazilians' aspirations for order and progress — the motto on the national flag —, presiding over the country with honesty and respect. The text did not explain who those Brazilians were, just as it did not mention the Brazilians whose human rights were violated.

My research hypothesizes that, given the inability to address the military dictatorship explicitly, MHEx/FC created a generic exhibit about all the presidents. For example, Marshal Floriano Peixoto, Brazil's second president (1891-1894), already has a diorama with his mannequin in the Republic room about his government, so there was no real need for a second space about him. The decision to emphasize individual military figures rather than historical episodes, blending those who came to power through coups d'états with those elected, was an attempt to depoliticize the issue of militaries in power and detach them from the authoritarian project. Moreover, it worked to naturalize 1964 as just another instance of the "army's eternal duty" to safeguard the nation, avoiding any critical problematization of their actions. This erasure of violence is evident in the texts for each president, which provide a summary of their government and a list of achievements aligned with the authoritarian modernization project of the regime.[192]

The text about Marshall Humberto Alencar Castello Branco stated that he was one of the main leaders of the "Civilian-Military Movement" of March 31st, 1964, reminding the reader of the civilian support for the coup. Among his achievements, the text highlighted the establishment of the *Superintendência do Desenvolvimento da Amazônia* (Superintendency of Development for the Amazon, SUDAM) and the *Fundo de Garantia do Tempo de Serviço* (Length-of-Service

[192] Scholars argued that the coup d'état of 1964 was rather anti-communist than anti-reformist. To accommodate the different groups that supported the regime, the militaries promoted modernization through repression and conservative moral. See Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta, "A Ditadura nas Universidades: Repressão, Modernização e Acomodação," *Ciência e Cultura* 66 no.4 (Oct./Dec.2014) : https://doi.org/10.21800/S0009-67252014000400010.

Guarantee Fund, FGTS), mechanisms that still exist among the many legacies of the dictatorship in Brazilian democracy. Following the assumption that the Amazon had a demographic gap and ignoring Indigenous populations, Castello Branco created SUDAM in 1966 to develop policies for encouraging industrialization, agricultural exploration, and "settlement" in the region. Since then, this project has led to increased mining, deforestation due to the sale of illegal timber and cattle farming, as well as land conflicts.[193] In the same year, the FGTS facilitated worker turnover in the private sector, as employees subsequently lost job security. In the following years, marked by the rural exodus to urban centers and the ample supply of labour, employers could fire their workers at any time and hire others for a lower salary. The workers who lost their jobs would receive the monetary compensation of FGTS. [194] Unfortunately, with neoliberal and precarious labour reforms in Brazil since the 1990s, the FGTS is understood as an essential social insurance nowadays. If the museum visitor did not know that workers had greater stability before 1966, they would read that information and praise Castello Branco and the army for such achievement. In reality, SUDAM and FGTS are symbols of the developmental discourse that aimed to promote an authoritarian modernization at the expense of the poorest sections of the population.

The list of achievements continued and grew in the governments of Artur da Costa e Silva (1967-1969) and Emílio Garrastazu Médici (1969-1974), highlighting the creation of state corporations, such as the *Empresa Brasileira de Correios e Telégrafos* (Brazilian Post and Telegraph Corporation, ECT), *Embraer* (Brazilian Aeronautics Company), and *Embrapa* (Brazilian Aeronautics Company). The panels also mentioned the "monuments" of the

[193] See Amadeu de Farias Cavalcante Júnior, "A Vision of the Legal Amazon During the Military Dictatorship: Capitalism and Dependent Development in The Context Of Sudam (1965-1977)," *Veredas do Direito* 18 no.40 (Jan-April 2021), 145-189 and Agda Lima Brito, "A Degradação Durante a Ditadura Militar na Região Amazônica (1960 - 1980)," *Anais do 32 Simpósio Nacional de História - Anpuh* Nacional (July 2023), 1-16.

[194] See Maya Damasceno Valeriano, "O Processo de Precarização das Relações de Trabalho e a Legislação Trabalhista: O Fim da Estabilidade no Emprego e o FGTS," (MA Thesis, UFF, 2008).

dictatorship: the Rio–Niterói Bridge, the Itaipu Dam, and the Angra Nuclear Power Plant. As the historian Deborah Neves observed, the military attributed a symbolic and memorial meaning to the construction of public works, which were often named after the military presidents. These reinforced concrete monuments, which have a practical and enduring use, materialized how the "Revolution of 1964" modernized Brazil. The exhibition strengthened this common sense that the elevated highways and bridges are symbols of how the dictatorship was a period of prosperity.[195]

Figure 3.7: Entrance of the Military Presidents of Brazil Exhibit (1889-1985), removed around 2019-2020
(Photograph by Akangatu)

[195] Deborah Neves, "Naquele Tempo Era Melhor: Grandes Obras Públicas Como Monumentos da Ditadura Civil-Militar na Cidade de São Paulo," in *A Ditadura Fora do Eixo: Uma Viagem Pelo Brasil Autoritário*, ed. Pedro Ernesto Fagundes, Paulo César Gomes, Ana Rita Fonteles, Anderson da Silva Almeida, Mariana Joffily (Serra: Identidade Editorial, 2025), 554-578.

Figure 3.8: Wooden cases displaying the Presidents General Eurico Gaspar Dutra and Marshal Humberto de Alencar Castello Branco, removed around 2019-2020
(Photograph by Akagantu)

Like the permanent exhibition, the Military Presidents Room was opened during the administration of a former opponent of the dictatorship. This research hypothesizes that the room was, again, a reaction to the politics of memory. President Lula's first and second terms (2002-2010) continued FHC's work on reparations to victims of the military dictatorship. For instance, the Amnesty Commission, created in 2001, continued to receive reparation claims from those whose lives and careers were impacted by political persecution.[196] In 2007, one year before the opening of the Military Presidents Room, the CEMDP released for the first time a formal report about its work. The book *Direito à Memória e à Verdade* (The Right to Memory and Truth) focuses on the cases analyzed by the Commission, featuring a photograph and a short biography of all the dead and disappeared people.

Different from the mid-1990s, the context in the late 2000s represented a favourable moment to approach 1964. There was broad criticism against the present government, and the

[196] Atencio, *Memory's Turn*, 17.

exhibit might have capitalized on that moment. By describing the military presidents as *honest*, *dedicated* and *respectful* of the country, the curatorial text was perhaps making a veiled criticism of Lula and the vote-buying scandal, *Mensalão*. As discussed in previous chapters, the scholarship has already dismissed the false claim that the military dictatorship was not corrupt, demonstrating that the lack of transparency and censorship enabled the military government to avoid accountability. Regarding behind the scenes information in the Museum, this research did not find details about the Fort Copacabana leadership at that time, Colonel Edson Silva de Oliveira, and his approach to 1964. However, the then Military Commander of the East, General Luiz Cesário da Silva Filho, and the Head of the Department of Education and Research, General Paulo Cesar de Castro, were both spokesmen of the military dictatorship. In his last speech before retirement in 2009, Castro made a public statement exalting the coup d'état, celebrated the Amnesty Law of 1979, paid honour to the military President Emílio Médici (1969-1974), and attacked Lula for creating racial quotas for universities.[197] Silva Filho and Castro would most likely have encouraged or at least supported the opening of the exhibition honouring former military presidents. Moreover, in the early 2000s, the Brazilian army also returned positively to the newspaper coverage with its role in the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti, which will be discussed in the next section. A couple of months after the opening of the Military Presidents Room, the army also started the pacification of *favelas* (slums) in Rio de Janeiro in the war on drugs context, which, over the years, has proven disastrous, and an important step to the advance of the militias. However, at that time, mass media and state authorities supported the pacification. In this way, the institution's positive image and

[197] Guilherme Poggio, "General destaca governo Medici e critica cotas raciais," https://www.forte.jor.br/2009/05/12/general-destaca-governo-medici-e-critica-cotas-raciais/ (Accessed 5 September 2025).

criticism of the Lula administration were also factors that may have encouraged the Museum to, finally, address the military dictatorship.[198]

In researching the MHEx/FC website, I observed that the Military Presidents Room is mentioned, at least until 2018, indicating that the exhibit was removed between 2019 and 2021, the date of my first exploratory visit to the museum. Coincidentally, those years also corresponded to the first half of the Bolsonaro administration. Given the political polarization in Brazil, I assumed that the rise of Bolsonaro as president might be a reason. This assumption was confirmed after my interview with one member of the MHEx/FC technical team, who is identified here as the "Museologist."[199]

Answering my questions with caution, the "Museologist" said that when he started to work in the museum in 2012, the exhibit was already polemical: often visitors scribbled on the wooden cases and left comments on social media complaining about the content. According to him, "even the military personnel did not like the exhibition." Around 2019-2020 — he was unsure of the date — the room had leaks and the wooden cases were infested with termites. The Museum leadership at the time, Colonel Alexandre Saraiva do Nascimento (currently working in the Ministry of Defence), saw it as an opportunity to finally remove it, and they "managed" to take the exhibit down. From the "Museologist"'s account, the military personnel appear to have sought to distance themselves, at least publicly, from an exhibition addressing the military dictatorship. Furthermore, it seems that the officers who inaugurated the room in 2008 did not expect either the possibility of the army being criticized or even confronted within its own space, ignoring that museum visitors

[198] See Henrique de Oliveira Mendonça, "Guerras Brasílicas do Século XXI Soluções Táticas nas Pequenas Frações," *Military Review* (Second Semester 2020): 15-24, and Bruno Paes Manso, *A República das Milícias: Dos Esquadrões da Morte à Era Bolsonaro* (São Paulo: Todavia, 2020).

[199] "The Museologist," interview by Ana Paula Santana Bertho, November 14, 2023, online. I also had the opportunity to informally speak to him in person and online between 2023-2024.

are not passive. Despite being bothered by the exhibit (or mainly the comments and protests), the commandants in the museum could not simply close the room. It took an infestation—and perhaps the intensification of political polarization—to convince both supporters and opponents of the exhibit in the army that it needed to be closed.

When I asked whether supporters of Bolsonaro might have appropriated the Museum or engaged in any kind of manifestation, the "Museologist" said that it has not happened. However, he had observed a greater frequency of visitors who supported the former president, identified by wearing the national soccer team shirt, and not losing the opportunity to take pictures with Brazilian flags in the long-term exhibition.[200] Even though the Military Presidents Room exhibit is closed, Bolsonarists, who call themselves "patriots," have the Colonial-Empire and Republic rooms to support their narrative.

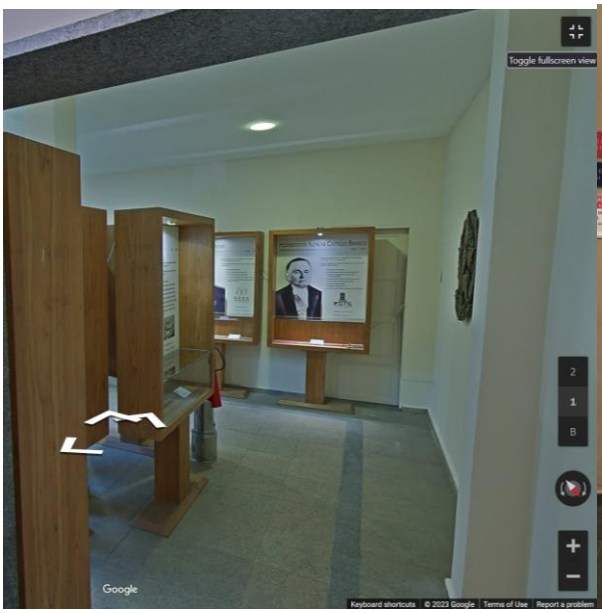

Figure 3.9: Room between 2008 and 2019-2020. (Photograph by Akagantu)


Figure 3.10: Room in 2024. (Photograph by Ana Paula Bertho)

[200] Since the 2013 protests, the Brazilian soccer team shirt became a sort of "official uniform" for far-right supporters, a symbol for those considered the "real patriotics." Paolo Demuru, *Politicas do Encanto*, 35.

Figure 3.11: Room between 2008 and 2019-2020
(Photograph by Akagantu)

Figure 3.12: Room in 2024
(Photograph by Ana Paula Bertho)

Regarding political contexts, it may appear paradoxical that the Military President Room was opened during the government of someone who opposed the military dictatorship, and it was closed when a fierce defender of the authoritarian regime came to power. There are some hypotheses to explain this outcome. Different than 2008, the army did not enjoy the same good

public image in 2019-2020. Indeed, more uncivil voices were promoting the armed right memories, but, at the same time, more voices were also criticizing these narratives, and complaining about the Amnesty Law of 1979. The army was again in the spotlight in the news, and this situation may have activated the army's internal conflicts regarding the publicization of memories about the military dictatorship. As discussed in the previous chapters on March 31st, militaries have been divided on whether to commemorate the date, discuss the topic, or turn this page and move forward. During the Bolsonaro administration, this division deepened and was worsened by the president's personal use of historical narratives, which particularly the older military officers in the barracks criticized. Closing the exhibition, perhaps, was another decision to establish a distance between the institution and the President.

Bolsonaro is such a divisive figure that, in the interviews, participants were asked if the Military Presidents Room were still up, Bolsonaro would be considered one of them. The answers were equally divided. On one hand, those in favour saw a continuity between the former nine presidents and Bolsonaro. Even before I asked that question, the "Archivist" was shocked to learn that the exhibit was taken down and commented, "Was that room closed during a *military government*? That is not possible!"

On the other hand, some interviewees understood that Bolsonaro was part of the army, but once he left, he lost his rank. The "Historian" seemed very uncomfortable with my question. In return, he questioned me:

> I will ask you a question: do you consider [Getúlio] Vargas as a military president? He went to the border to fight; he was a sergeant. Bolsonaro was a captain, which means he spent little time in the barracks. He has some aspects of military ethics, but he is a politician with roots in the military, just like Vargas. Vargas was expelled for disobedience. [President] JK (Juscelino Kubitschek) was a medical captain, just like Bolsonaro, but no one thinks of him as a military man.

The key difference among Bolsonaro, Vargas, and JK perhaps lies in how each sought to portray themselves politically and to be remembered by society. Vargas (1930-1945 and 1951-

1954), who also led a coup d'état in 1937, employed populist rhetoric to become the "Father of the Poor." JK (1956-1961) is known as the "Bossa Nova President" for building Brasília and for industrial modernization. Bolsonaro flirts with Evangelicalism, being called "Messiah" (also his real middle name), but above all, he is the "captain," who promised his supporters that the armed forces would save Brazil. Additionally, being associated with the army and considered a military president has taken on a different meaning since 1985. Political scientist Leigh A. Payne explained that uncivil movements use narratives from the historical stock to legitimize themselves and support their demands in the present. Bolsonaro decided to connect his public image to the armed forces and the authoritarian past from the beginning of his political career, hanging in his office the portraits of the five military dictatorship presidents on the wall, and a poster on the door comparing disappeared people's relatives to dogs who "look for bones."[201] This strategy of aligning himself with the military proved effective, as the army remains, for much of the civilian population, associated not only with right-wing and conservative values, order, and repression, but also with memories of economic prosperity. That is "Brazil" for these people align with a military past, and Bolsonaro knew how to communicate with them.

For roughly a decade, the MHEx/FC had the opportunity to break the silence and carry out old plans to address the "Revolution of 1964," and when the museum decided to close the Military Presidents Room, it hoped to end all the controversies. Returning to the silence about the period between 1964 and 1985 was a comfortable solution. However, the 2010-2020 period also represented another era in Brazil: the era of human rights. The CNV and other state and municipal truth commissions encouraged more studies of the military dictatorship, as well as the development of signage and guided tours, to share these memories with the public. Scholars and educators have

[201] "Internautas relembram fala de filha de Rubens Paiva sobre Jair Bolsonaro," *O Tempo*, December 2, 2024.

also shown the legacies of state terrorism in public security policy, and the need for changes that protect the population, especially the marginalized groups. So why not also address human rights in the MHEx/FC as well?

4. From Dictators to Peacemakers

Until mid-2019, visitors concluded their exploration of the Republic Room and walked to an attached space that served as a cabinet of curiosities. According to the "Professor," the idea was to exhibit some memorabilia in showcases on the walls. Such objects are no longer displayed. Currently, instead of seeing lleged Napoleon Bonaparte's lock of hair, old berets, medals, and miniatures of soldiers, they walk towards a UN blue helmet and many international awards congratulating Brazil for its leadership in the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) between 2004 and 2017.

By asking Brazil to participate in the stabilization, the UN recognized the influence of the Lula administration in the region. The Brazilian army, which had created a pacification model to intervene in the *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro and combat the narcotrafic, led the UN mission in Haiti after President Bertrand Aristide departed for exile in the aftermath of an armed conflict. Between 2004 and 2017, the army sent 37,000 officers to Haiti and commanded thousands of peacekeepers from 19 countries. According to the"Historian," the Haitian experience strengthened the "self-esteem" of the institution and of those who joined the mission, including some who were later integrated into Bolsonaro's government.

The room lacks curatorial text explaining the exhibition. Still, all 32 wooden cases with awards have signs identifying the countries that granted them, from Canada, Japan, the United States, South Korea, to Nepal. There are also mementos of the mission, such as a blue helmet worn

by the officers — a worldwide symbol for peacekeeping, and through association the defence of human rights — and the national flag used to cover the Brazilians who died in the earthquake in 2010. According to the "Museologist," the transition from having a cabinet of curiosities to MINUSTAH happened around the same time as the closing of the Military Presidents exhibit, "taking the opportunity to make changes." In a context of polarization, the MHEx/FC sought to play it safe: transitioning from a polemical to a neutral topic, from an internal issue to an operation in international territory, from individuals to a collective approach, changing the narrative from dictators to peacemakers.

MINUSTAH, however, was highly controversial. In addition to failing to stabilize Haitian politics, the mission left an estimated 30,000 people dead and 2,000 victims of sexual assault and exploitation, primarily women and children, some of whom became pregnant. The mission also brought cholera to the island and subjected citizens to widespread threats and abuses, such as the massacre in Cité Soleil, led by General Augusto Heleno, who was later responsible for the Institutional Security Cabinet of Bolsonaro's government. NGOs accuse Brazilian military officers of their conduct and disastrous leadership, and demand that the army should be held accountable.[202] None of these issues was addressed in the exhibition, creating a silence in the successful narrative that is legitimized internationally by the many awards displayed.

[202] Paulo Motoryn,"Crise No Haiti Tem Digital de Generais Bolsonaristas; Saiba Quais Ministros Atuaram no País, Brasil De Fato." https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2021/07/07/crise-no-haiti-tem-digital-de-generais-bolsonaristas-saiba-quais-ministros-atuaram-no-pais/ (Accessed 10 September 2025); Brasil de Fato, "20 Anos da Minustah: Alba Movimentos Pede Justiça Por Crimes Cometidos pelo Exército Brasileiro Contra Haitianos," https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2024/06/01/20-anos-da-minustah-alba-movimentos-pede-justica-por-crimes-cometidos-pelo-exercito-brasileiro-contra-haitianos/ (Accessed 10 September 2025);" and Mariana Cabrera Figueroa, "Peacekeeping in Haiti: Successes and Failures," https://sites.bu.edu/pardeeatlas/research-and-policy/back2school/peacekeeping-in-haiti-successes-and-failures/ (Accessed 10 September 2025).

Figure 3.13: Cabinet of Curiosities, sometime between 1998 and 2018, when it was removed
(Photograph by Akangatu)

Figure 3.14: Awards recognizing Brazilian army leadership in the MINUSTAH. Exhibition in 2024
(Photograph by Ana Paula Bertho)

Figure 3.15: Clothing: blue helmet used by members of the Brazilian Battalion of the UN Peacekeeping in Haiti between June 2004 and April 2017.
(Photograph by Ana Paula Bertho)

The MINUSTAH room is the beginning of a series of changes that reinforced the idea of a new chapter in the history of the army. According to the "Museologist," the MHEx/FC intends to add more exhibitions about on the Peace Missions in Africa and Asia, and address the contemporary army, focusing on successful projects of military engineering.

Currently, visitors leave the Republic Room by viewing the diorama on the Second World War, and then enter the MINUSTAH exhibit. These narratives associate the army with two symbols of international collaboration in defence of human rights (WWII and UN peacekeeping). Together, these two episodes in the Brazilian army's history have silenced the army's actions within national territory over the past decades, thereby contributing to the construction of a positive institutional image.

5. Conclusion

In his memoir, Freitas attributed to General Zenildo de Lucena the following quote: "Preserving the memory of the institution consolidates the foundation on which the army of the future will be built."[203] Both Lucenas and Freitas recognized that preserving memories requires collecting and conserving objects, safeguarding historical buildings and, above all, building narratives that legitimize these memories and disseminate their meanings.

Over almost four decades, the MHEx/FC has worked behind the scenes and in its exhibitions towards the legitimization of positive memories of the army, reacting and reshaping the army's image within democracy. As a memory product of the transition to democracy, the museum represents an authoritarian institution that, after 21 years in power, sought a new place to speak in democracy and build the army of the future. Internally, the museum has educated military personnel about the institution's history and the importance of using culture as a common language with civilians. Externally, the Fort enables visitors, whether Brazilian or not, to see another "side" of the army, presenting a traditional history through a pleasant space of leisure. In this sense, the Museum represents an interesting example in the memory market, as it has been able to adapt to different political and cultural contexts, set partnerships, and attract different audiences (external and internal).

Despite the museum's development occurring on the sidelines of the memory policies about the dictatorship, there is a silence about the period between 1964 and 1985, which was only broken for around ten years. This position has left the museum far from controversy, ultimately showing its commitment to the Amnesty Law of 1979 and being truly a *Verde Oliva* company. However, the absence of references to the recent past does not prevent Bolsonarists from finding symbols

[203] Freitas, *Forte de Copacabana*, Preface.

that sustain their ideology. The colonial discourse that intertwines the army and the nation is rooted in this shared vision.

With the end of the military regime, human rights activists, former political prisoners, relatives of dead and disappeared people raised their voices, insisting that they would keep telling their stories and still seek truth and justice in democracy. As Bilbija and Payne note, memory became a currency, and its value has increased during decades of democracy and the global promotion of human rights.[204] In this sense, the army also quickly responded to both the market and to this hegemonic memory, in a quieter but equally firm tone, with the creation of the Museum. As analysts are aware of the dynamics of the memory market, the Museum strategically took advantage of the political context and introduced an exhibition on the military dictatorship. Later, perhaps facing growing competition and pressure from other memory producers and aiming to distance itself from Bolsonaro, the Museum undertook a process of "rebranding:" the Military Presidents Room was removed, and a new exhibition highlighting the army's engagement with human rights was inaugurated. This shift reflected an attempt to align its narratives with the market and, again, legitimize the institution. The MHEx reminds the country that the armed forces would continue sharing their narratives, as they have been doing even before those pro-human rights voices, since the birth of the nation.

[204] Ksenija Bilbija and Leigh A.Payne, *Accounting for Violence*, 4.

Conclusion

My thesis began on the day that Bolsonaro was elected, and it ended months after his conviction. On January 8th, 2023 and in the following years, many invaders of Brasília were arrested and prosecuted. The judiciary also identified instigators and supporters across the country, including Bolsonaro himself. On September 11, 2025, he and seven other members of his government, including military figures cited in this thesis, such as Generals Walter Braga Netto and Augusto Heleno, were convicted for the coup d'état attempt in 2023. The former President was sentenced to 27 years and three months in prison for staging a coup, attempting violent abolition of the democratic rule of law, being implicated in violence, posing a serious threat to the state's assets and listed heritage, and being part of an armed criminal organization. This is the first time the military has been convicted in Brazilian democracy. The military dictatorship was cited a few times during the trial. As Minister Cármen Lúcia defined it, on that day, "Brazil encountered its past, present, and future."[205]

Indeed, my thesis speaks to this contemporary Brazil, and its eruptions from the past. The analysis of two memory products, the commemorations of March 31st (2014-2022) and the Army's Historical Museum and Fort Copacabana, aimed to identify dialogues and disputes over the hegemonic liberal memory and the human rights culture as they have developed in the country in the decades since the military dictatorship. Contributing to the historiography about the transition to democracy, my investigation aimed to understand and uncover the social and political role of the armed right's memories of the military dictatorship in Brazilian democracy.

[205] "Trama Golpista: Cármen Lúcia Descreve Julgamento como Encontro do Brasil com Passado, Presente e Futuro," *G1*, September 11, 2025.

First, despite the victims-centered memories having had protagonism in the past decades, the building of the Army's Historical Museum challenges the image that the army remained almost entirely silent in the barracks, watching the "losers of 1964" recount their stories from the past. The creation of the Museum in 1986 demonstrated the army's awareness of the importance of (re)positioning itself in the memory market and within the new democratic context and the humans rights era. Even though the institution could not openly speak about the recent past, the MHEx/FC used discursive strategies to reaffirm the army/armed forces' place and foster support towards the institution. The idea of the army being the saviour of the nation is a narrative set within a long-term perspective, with the military dictatorship being just one of its events. Except for the military regime, the history textbooks still reproduce a similar narrative, demonstrating the need for a new decolonial approach towards the colonial foundations of present-day Brazil.

The chapters also pointed out that, both inside the Museum or on the streets, in the parliament and newspapers, the memories of armed right must be historicized to understand how it has reacted and adapted to the different contexts of democracy. These narratives were challenged by the transition to democracy in 1985 and by cultural works and politics of memory that renewed calls for accountability in the following decades. Yet, the armed right memories also found gaps and opportunities to emerge strongly in public when the PT administration, one of the main torchbearers of the hegemonic liberal memory, became a political target.

In this sense, the commemorations of March 31st enabled the tracking of clashes with hegemonic memories over the past decade, particularly revealing the flawed notion of a civil society that has always been democratic and was a victim of the military. In a moment of crisis in the sociopolitical space that promoted the hegemonic liberal memory of a unified civil society victimized by the dictatorship, various groups that had coalesced for decades around this narrative

began to defend their own identities and projects. Marcos Napolitano cited the *Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira* (Brazilian Social Democracy Party, PSDB) and the liberal press, represented and analyzed in this work through *Folha de São Paulo*, *O Globo*, and *O Estado de São Paulo*, as examples. To criticize the PT administration, both actors, who have always identified with a center-right/right ideology, started to lean towards more conservative leaders and civilians, bringing an openly fascist and coup-plotting far right back to the public space.[206]

Again, the idea of a democratic civil society proved to be a fallacy. Chapter 1 demonstrated that, even if the barracks were officially silent because of the Amnesty Law of 1979, there were civilians who embodied the historical narrative of the armed right and were ready to speak out. In addition to the military headquarters, the nostalgia for the dictatorship was cultivated among civilians for all those years as well. The lack of accountability for the crimes perpetrated during the military dictatorship, poor social justice or the advance of progressive agendas, the 2013 protests, the CNV, the corruption scandals, and the distrust in the PT administration and the political system in general empowered these uncivil actors to gather, both online and in person, to share the armed right narrative and values. Facing a complicated present, these groups look at the past to find some comfort. As in other moments in Brazilian history, the armed right represented a solution to address problems. The decades of human rights work offered resistance and criticism for these memories, however, armed right goods are trending in the market.

In this sense, the period from 2014 to 2018 marked the rise of uncivil movements, movements that either intentionally or through practice undermined democracy. Unlike the mere dispute between left-wing and right-wing groups, uncivil movements use democratic tools and spaces and their freedom of speech for anti-democratic aims. For instance, when groups went to

[206] Marcos Napolitano, "Recordar é Vencer," 32-33.

the streets to demand a military intervention as a solution between 2014 and 2016, Generals and the Military Club legitimized the coup d'état and were against any accountability, or when Bolsonaro casted his vote in favour of Rousseff's impeachment (which is another example) and dedicated it to the perpetrator Colonel Ustra, they were acting against democracy. In this process, newspapers not only captured uncivil voices but also amplified them, granting greater public visibility to these actors. This dynamic contributed to a broader reconfiguration of Brazil's political party scenario. PSDB, which was the option for more conservative voters and held a strong presence in the legislatures and executive positions until 2014, has become insignificant. New right and far-right parties, such as the PL, have gained more visibility in recent years. As a strategy to attract right-wing voters who do not identify themselves with uncivil movements, Lula invited Geraldo Alckmin, a figure historically associated with the right, to serve as his Vice-President for the 2022 Elections.

The election of Bolsonaro and his government (2019-2022) represented the return of uncivil movements to power and institutionalized the memories of the armed right. Chapter 2 examined these narratives in the institutional sphere and how the process of mythmaking manipulates historical and cultural material to achieve consensus. Among the interesting findings that contribute to the historiography about military memories in Brazil is that the analysis highlights the differences between the former President and the armed forces. Both criticized the cracks in the hegemonic memory, reminding civilians of their role in supporting the coup d'état of 1964, and explored this fact to justify the idea that the armed forces acted by popular demand. However, there were differences regarding the use and sharing of these memories. The sources analyzed highlight a division among military personnel: some supported the publicization of the memories, while others believed the topic should not be revisited because the country must move

on. Throughout this dissertation, it has also been observed that the military personnel who chose to speak publicly about the armed right memories signalled an ongoing reshaping of the institution itself. These individuals are familiar with the dynamics of the memory market and no longer carry weapons; instead, they borrow and abuse concepts from human rights discourse and historiographical debates, often undermining the forced disappearances, deaths and practice of torture.

Even among supporters of commemorating March 31st, there was no agreement on the appropriate form such commemorations should take. The Orders of the Day reflected a preference for a quieter and formal tone, aligned with the Amnesty Law of 1979. In comparison, over the four years, Bolsonaro consistently adopted a celebratory and informal tone, often weaponizing these memories to attack political opponents and promising that the armed forces would intervene if the nation (his supporters) demanded. These differences led to clashes between Bolsonaro and the military, who accused him of abusing these memories, revealing generational and ideological dissent within the forces.

Stating that Bolsonaro and the armed forces are not the same does not mean that the latter is not an uncivil movement. The withdrawal of members of the armed forces from Jair Bolsonaro's project did not occur because it is an institution that defends democracy; actually, it is the opposite: military members agreed to participate in the coup plot to prevent Lula and Alckmin from assuming the Presidency and Vice Presidency in 2022.[207] The army neither expelled protesters nor permitted them to camp outside the military headquarters, demanding military intervention after the 2022 election results. One hypothesis is that Bolsonaro's insubordination to the military

[207] "Brasil Condena Generais por Golpe de Estado pela Primeira Vez na História," *BBC*, September 12, 2025.

hierarchy in the past and during his government, as well as lack of conditions for a coup, made the armed forces assess the risks of dealing with new demands for accountability, besides 1964.

This investigation raises further questions and identifies avenues for future research. Regarding March 31st, future research should analyze the commemorations on social media and groups on instant messaging apps, such as WhatsApp and Telegram, examining the symbols, formats (memes, reels, videos, etc) and circulation and reactions in the digital sphere. Another significant trend that emerged during the research and merits attention is the limits of freedom of expression. Should speeches praising the military dictatorship be forbidden? One trend that emerged during the Bolsonaro administration, and warrants further investigation, was the series of legal disputes over attempts to prevent official celebrations, particularly the release of the "Orders of the Day." Over the years, judicial responses to these manifestations were inconsistent and fragmented, revealing a lack of clarity on how to address memory and the notion that forgetting the past is essential for consolidating democracy. Not by chance, Bolsonaro supporters and allies in the National Congress have championed a campaign for amnesty. These ambiguities and paradoxes should be discussed along with the permanence of the Amnesty Law of 1979, and the recent trial of Bolsonaro and six other military officers.

On a separate note, my research encourages further study of military museums from the post-conflict perspective in Brazil. In particular, with particular attention to the different approaches adopted by the army, navy, and air force. Undoubtedly, the army was a protagonist during the dictatorship with all five military presidents from this force, and only two vice-presidents from the Navy. Based on how each force structures its institutional memory differently in the present, and the disputes between the forces observed during this research, a question remains: when the term “armed forces” is cited in the narratives about the past, how much does it

mean the three forces, or is it used interchangeably with "army?" What are the differences and similarities between memories of the army, navy, and air force?

This thesis also ends at a "temporal crossroad." On one hand, I look back and see how the chapters analyzed the political changes and the uses and abuses of the symbolic material that shaped the temporary Brazil. On the other hand, I look to the future and consider the next chapters of the armed right memories, particularly from its Bolsonarist perspective. After all, the conviction of Bolsonaro or his electoral ineligibility did not mean the defeat of the ideas he represents. The municipal elections of 2024 and the polls for federal elections in 2026 show that Bolsonarism is still here, is not going anywhere, and may harden.[208]

Elizabeth Jelin notes that discussions about memories rarely do not incorporate the researcher's subjectivity, their experience, emotions, and commitments.[209] Analyzing the construction and transmission of the historical narratives of the armed right requires understanding its mechanisms and a call to think about my own practices as a public historian and interpreter in this polarized context. In line with Jelin, I also believe in the coexistence of different groups, even if conflictual. I also concur with her and Carlos Fico that critical reflection and analytical tools should be made available to social actors as instruments of empowerment.[210] From this perspective, such approach can question the armed rights memories and demonstrate that authoritarianism is not the most helpful solution to address contemporary problems. Moreover, Demuru's concept of the politics of allurement invites the reflection on how these narratives should be inspiring, offer hope and call for action.

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[208] "Eleições 2024: Centro e Direita Colocam a Esquerda em Sinal de Alerta Para 2026," *Brasil de Fato*, October 29, 2024.
[209] Jelin, *Los trabajos de la memoria*, 31.
[210] Fico, "Violence, Trauma, and Frustration in Brazil and Argentina": 280.

Nevertheless, the hegemonic memory constructed at the end of the military dictatorship demonstrated that historical narratives are not enough to anchor democracy. The literary critic Andreas Huyssen argues that the politics of memory, which aims at "never again," must be rooted in discourses and practices of justice and human rights. In addition to learning from past mistakes, one should be able to recognize in institutions a way to prevent atrocities. [211] Elizabeth Jelin also reminds us that the opposite of forgetting is justice.[212] In the Brazilian case, the country continues to wait for accountability: is it possible to move forward without reviewing the Amnesty Law?

[211] Andreas Huyssen, "Memory Culture and Human Rights: A New Constellation," in *Historical Justice and Memory*, ed. Klaus Neumann and Janna Thompson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), 28.
[212] Elizabeth Jelin, *Los trabajos de la memoria*, 157.

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